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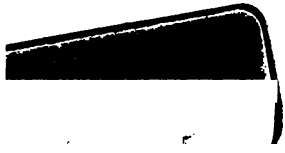

MY LITTLE GIRL.

MY LITTLE GIRL.

A Novel.

BY THE AUTHORS OF

"READY-MONEY MORTIBOY."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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MY LITTLE GIRL.

CHAPTER I.

VENN, on the following morning, called upon his sister.

She burst forth with all her tale of trouble as soon as she saw him. Hartley judiciously gave her

the reins, only occasionally murmuring sympathetically.

"Why, Sukey," he said, when she had quite finished, "you can do nothing better than persist. It is the most outrageous tyranny. And such a beautiful animal, too. St. Cyril, come here. Sh—tsh! A lovely cat."

"I thought you hated cats, Hartley."

"As a rule, I do. But not such a superb creature as this. St. Cyril—what a beautiful name for a cat! Suggestive of howlings on chimney-tops—I mean, of purrings on the hearth-rug. My dear sister, you have a genius for giving names. When I was a child—when we were children together—you used to call me Billabelub for short, I remember well."

Sukey began to purr too, falling into the trap baited by flattery as innocently as any creature of the forest.

"I think I chose a good name, in spite of Mr. De Vere. Take a glass of wine, Hartley, and a biscuit. Why do you call here so seldom?"

"The sherry, by all means."

He poured out two glasses.

"Hartley, you know I never take wine in the morning."

"As it is poured out, you may as well drink it. Besides, it will do you good."

She drank it, and appeared to like it.

"But I came to tell you some good news, Sukey," he went on, seeing that the moment had arrived. "My little girl has come back to me."

Sukey said nothing, but looked up sharply.

"Yes. Her husband has ill-treated her."

"Her husband! She has a husband, then?"

"Sukey! Why, how else should she have left me?"

This was a facer. Hartley followed up the advantage.

"Her husband, it appears—"

"Who is her husband, Hartley?"

"Mr. Philip Durnford, lieutenant in the ——th Regiment, cousin of Arthur Durnford, whose father used to be a pupil at the Rectory. You remember him thirty years ago?"

"My dear brother. As if I could remember anything so long ago as that."

"True, I forgot. Philip Durnford, I am sorry to say, is not a good man. He made her conceal the marriage, destroyed the letters she wrote to me, forbade her writing any more, and at last ruined himself and turned her out of doors. Lollie has had a hard time, Sukey."

"Where is she now?"

"She had nowhere to go, wandered about trying to find me in my chambers, kept on missing me, and at last was picked up by a girl whom she befriended two or three years ago, who took her in like a Samaritan, and we nursed her through a fortnight of dangerous illness. She is still almost too weak to be moved."

"You must see her husband at once."

"I think not."

"Then, where can she go? Hartley, you must not begin that old business of having her up in your chambers."

"No, certainly not—that must be put a stop to. I have thought it over. She must go, Sukey"—here he became very impressive—"she must go to the house of some lady, a little, but not too much, older than herself, of a kind and affectionate disposition—my child is dreadfully broken and weak, Sukey—where her wounds may be healed, and we can teach her to forget some of her troubles; where she will have no reproaches, no worries, no hard words."

"Where will you find such a guardian?"

"Where? Here, Sukey, here"—he took her fat little hands in his—"here, my dear. I know no other woman so good and kind as yourself,

and no house which will so entirely fulfil all the conditions as your own."

"Mine? Oh, goodness gracious!"

"Yours, Sukey. For there is, I am quite sure, no one in the world whose heart is so soft, and whose house is so comfortable as yours."

She sat silent.

"You know Lollie, too. It is not as if you were strangers. Remember how you used to kiss her when she was quite a little thing."

"I do," said Sukey. "The child's lips were always sticky with jam."

"They were. And it shows," said Hartley "the kindness of your heart to treasure up this trifling circumstance. Women alone know how to touch the chords of feeling. She was always extravagantly fond of jam. I remember, too, how you used to spread it for her on bread and butter, careful not to give her too much butter for fear of biliousness. The old days, Sukey, the old days!"

He was silent, as if overcome. Then he went on—

"And it is really kind—more kind than I know how to thank you for—to accede at once to my suggestion. I feel as if it came from you. Believe me, sister, I am very grateful."

He kissed her forehead; and the caress, so exceedingly rare from her brother, brought a glow of conscious benevolence to Sukey's cheeks. She almost felt as if she had really suggested the step. Then her heart sank again.

"Well, you know, my dear Hartley, I am the last person in the world to think of my own comfort."

"You are, indeed, Sukey," he murmured, with a glance at the sherry—"the very last. Always self-denying."

"But what will Anne think?"

Hartley rang the bell, and Anne appeared.

"My sister, Anne—upon my word, Anne, you are getting younger every day—wants to take, for a little while, a young lady into the house. Mrs. Durnford, who is unhappily separated from her husband. You remember her—my ward, Miss Collingwood, that was; but she is a little afraid that it will put you out."

Anne looked troubled.

"Not a young lady who will give trouble or any extra work, but one who wants a comfortable place, and thoughtful people like yourself about her."

"If Miss Venn wants it," said Anne.

"Of course she wants it."

"Then I'm not the one to make objections. And I'm sure the house wants a little brightening up. And you never coming but once in three months, Mr. Hartley."

"I shall come every day now, Anne. But haven't you got Mr. De Vere?"

This was the clergyman, with whom Anne did not hold.

"Mr. De Vere, indeed!" And Anne retreated.

"Then we will lose no time," said Hartley. "I don't think you could have her to-morrow; but the day after, perhaps."

"The day after? Oh, Hartley, will she be wanting gaiety and fuss, and everything?"

"Lollie? My dear Sukey, she wants quiet. But would it not be a nice thing—a graceful thing—if you would bring her here yourself?"

"If you prefer it, Hartley. Where is she?"

"Where she has been for the last three weeks. With Mary."

"Mary has got a surname, I suppose. Pray, what is the profession of Mary?"

"Mary—I mean, Mrs. Smith, whose—ahem! whose husband has gone to—to—"

"Where is he gone to?"

"How should I know where he is gone to?" replied Hartley, a little irritably, for he did not like being off the rails of truth. "Gone to Abraham's bosom, I suppose. So Mrs. Smith, you know, dances at the theatre, and supports her child in a creditable way."

"Now, Hartley, I will not—the grand-daughter of a Bishop, and all—go to the lodgings of a Dancing Person."

Hartley repressed an inclination to refer to the ancestral glue manufactory, and only meekly replied that there was no need.

"Bring Laura to your chambers the day after to-morrow," said Sukey, "and I will come and fetch her."

"Do, Sukey, come to breakfast — kidneys, sister. You shall take her away afterwards in a cab. You will be kind to her, Sukey?"

"Of course I will. Oh, dear! there is nothing but trouble. Now we shall have to make things ready. Well, go away, now, Hartley—you will only be in the way. I will come at ten."

Two days afterwards, Hartley brought his ward back again to the old chambers. Mary hugged and kissed her; but when Laura promised to call and see her soon, she only shook

her head, and said it was better not, and began to cry. And then she went back to her room again, and found it cheerless and dreary indeed.

Hartley helped Laura upstairs, and installed her in her old place, the old chair by the fire.

"It looks like what it used to be, Lollie," he said; "but it is not. It never can be again."

"Ah, no! It never can be again. My fault, my fault."

"Never again, never again. The waters are troubled, dear, and we shall be long in getting them clear. But think no more of the past. You are always my little girl, remember; and if you were dear to me before, Lollie, when you were but a child, you are doubly dear now, when you come back in your sorrow and trouble. There are to be no more lessons, and talks, and walks. I must not see you very often, and never here, because people might talk. But never doubt, my child, that I love you."

He kissed her forehead and caressed her face in his old calm way, while the tears were standing in his eyes. She dropped her face in her hands, and wept unrestrainedly.

Miss Venn appeared at this juncture. She had walked to Gray's Inn, making up her mind to be kind, but yet severe; for elopement should

always be visited by coldness of manner, at least. Besides, meditation of forty-eight hours had revealed to her the cunning manner in which her brother had entrapped her into a generosity of which she half repented.

But at sight of her brother's sorrow, and the weak, wasted figure in the chair, her resolution gave way; and almost before she had got the girl well in her fat, motherly arms, she was crying over her, and kissing her, with a vehemence which did infinite credit to the family.

Hartley left them, and presently returned with the kidneys, cooked in his bed-room. Nobody could do kidneys so well as Hartley, or brew such splendid coffee. And sympathy brings its own reward in the shape of appetite.

After this, she took Lollie away with her, laid her on the sofa, and, with Anne, made much of her.

I have only to add that the public appearance of Laura, and the way in which she was carried off by Miss Venn, entirely re-established her in the eyes of the Gray's Inn functionaries, and effectually drowned the voices of those who had said evil things about her disappearance.

CHAPTER II.

VENN went with a troubled mind to find Arthur Durnford. He knew nothing as yet of his changed fortunes, and had, indeed, only heard of Philip as a cousin of whom Arthur spoke little.

"Arthur," he said, shaking his hand, "something has happened to me."

"A great deal has happened to me," said Arthur, laughing; "but I hope your accident is not so serious as mine. It's a long story. But you shall have it."

He told all, from the very beginning.

"I gave up the fortune at once," he said, simply, "because it seemed to me clear and beyond any dispute that my father was actually married to this girl, who must have died in

Europe before he married again, and when Philip was a year old. He is only two years older than myself. I might have fought the case, my lawyer said; but it would have been at the cost of publishing my father's early history, perhaps raking up old scandals—all sorts of things. This I couldn't do; and Philip, who is the most generous man alive, insisted on my having double the sum which my father had given him. You see, my father never intended him to be his heir. Of that I am quite certain. On the other hand, by his will, Philip *is* the heir. And the decision of the case means legitimacy to him."

"I see," said Venn—"I see. Nevertheless, I do not believe. This man who supplies the proofs—I will tell you something about him directly."

"You can tell me very little that I do not know already. That MacIntyre is a scoundrel, an unscrupulous man, bound by no laws of honour, religion, or morality, I know already—partly from his own confession."

"He sold his proofs, I suppose?"

"I suppose so. I have not asked Philip what he asked or got for them."

"Tell me his address, if you know it."

"I know the street, but not the number. He is in lodgings in Keppel-street, Russell-square."

"Keppel-street? I know it. Yes—Keppel-street."

Over his face there stole a look of thankfulness, expressed by the movement of his sensitive lips. His colour rose just a little, but he was outwardly calm.

"You want to see him?"

"I think I shall probably call upon him to-day."

"But what has happened to you, Venn? I am so full of my own troubles that I am selfish, and forget yours."

"Mine are not all troubles, Arthur. My little girl has been restored to me."

Arthur did not dare say a word. He was afraid to ask the question that rose to his lips.

"Spotless, thank God, and pure. You shall learn, presently, how. But tell me first about this new-found brother of yours."

"What about him?"

"Is he, for instance, a man of honour?"

"I would stake my own upon Phil's honour."

"And truth?"

"Surely, my dear Venn, you have nothing to say or to suspect against Philip, have you?"

"And a man, you think, of generous leanings, of chivalrous feeling, of lofty sentiments, of —— Well, Arthur, I am going to give you a greater shock than the loss of your fortune. Listen to me. I used to tell my child, in a thoughtless way, that I should like, above all things, to see her married to a gentleman. She, my innocent and ignorant Lollie, brought up with me and me only, knew nothing about love, marriage, anything else that is common and practical. She and I lived among our books, and fed our minds on the words of old writers. Well—" he paused for a moment. "One night, when she left me, she was insulted in the street. A gentleman came to her help. Of all this she told me. She did not tell me the rest, because he persuaded her not to—that he met her again, that he told her he loved her, and begged her to marry him. She thought it would please me. She accepted him to please me. She kept silent to please me. You think it is impossible? You do not know how I had kept the girl from knowing the world and its wickedness. The day before the marriage, she told me she had a secret, and wanted to tell it me. I, though I saw her distress, blinded by my own ignorant conceit, bade her keep her secret, and refused to hear it.

The next day she was privately married by a Scotch clergyman—living, Arthur, in Keppel-street."

"Heavens, Venn! Do you mean MacIntyre? It was not Philip—it could not be Philip."

"Was the man ever a Scotch clergyman?"

"Who can know? He is a mass of lies. He would say so for his own purposes, whether he was or not."

"And yet you allowed him to take your fortune from you."

"Not on his own evidence, Venn. But go on."

"The man who married Lollie took her to Normandy with him. Before leaving the house in Keppel-street, Lollie wrote me a note, telling all. MacIntyre promised to take it himself to Gray's Inn. *He never did.* When they got to Normandy she wrote me a long letter—I can fancy what my little girl would say to me in it. Her husband took the letter to the post. *It never came.* She waited a week, and then she wrote again. Her husband took the letter to the post. The second letter *never came.* Then her husband brought her back to England, put her in a small house near London, and forbade her to write to me any more. You understand so much."

"It cannot be Philip," Arthur said.

"Wait. There is more. This was in June. It is now November. For nearly five months, then, she lived there. She was absolutely alone the whole time. Her husband left her in the morning, and usually came home at night. She dined alone, sat alone, had no visitors, no companions. All the time he was, as I gather, betting on horse-racing, gambling—losing money every day. Once or twice Mr. MacIntyre came to see her. Once her husband had a large party of men in the house. Then he sent her to her own room, and there kept her awake all night, singing and laughing. My little Lollie! When I think of it all, Arthur, I feel half mad! Wait, don't speak yet—there is more. It is now ten days ago. He came home very late; he rose at mid-day; he cursed at the breakfast; and then, without a word of regret, without a word to soften the blow, he turned upon his wife, told her that he was a ruined man, that he had nothing left at all, that she must leave him, because they never had been married at all. What do you think of that man, Arthur Durnford?"

"Finish your story."

"She left him—left him with nothing but

what she had when she married him. And all that night, that bitter, wretched, dismal night, with the wild wind and rain driving in her face, the poor girl wandered, wandered in the streets. Think of it, Arthur—think of it! My little girl walked about the streets all night long—never stopped, never sat down, never ate or drank. All night long—do you know what that means? The rain beating upon her, her wet clothes clinging to her, her brain confused and troubled, stupid with suffering; while the hours went on one after the other, creeping for her, flying for us. Good God! and I in my warm bed, asleep —unthinking. My dear, my little darling! If I only had but known!"

He was standing over Arthur, as the latter sat looking at him with pained and troubled face. Venn's eyes were heavy with those tears which do not fall, and his voice was shaken as he spoke.

"There is more still, Arthur. She wandered so—where, she does not know. In the morning a woman, a humble child of Samaria, gave her a cup of coffee. I have found that giver of the cup of coffee, Arthur. Then she thinks she sat down, somewhere, just before it grew light. And then she began to wander again. From noon till

noon, twenty-four hours of walking in the streets. She was to have been—she might have been, Arthur—a mother. Think of it. Then, if you like it put that way, God was good to her, and sent in her path a girl, a poor starving girl, whom I had helped two years before at Lollie's own prayer—her own prayer, mind, not any charitable act—when she was ignorant of what the girl had done, what it meant, and why her father had turned her away. Mary found her wandering down the street, and took her home, fainting and weary to death—not knowing what was being done to her. Then she sent to me. Lollie has been ill since. That was to be expected. At death's door. That, too, was to be expected.

"Now you know, Arthur, what has happened to me. Is my little girl blameless?"

"Surely, yes, Venn."

"And the man, Arthur—what is to be done with the man? I made her tell me his name, on the promise that I would not harm him. To keep that promise, it is necessary that I should not see him. But what is to be done with the man, I say? How can we make him feel what he has done? Is there any way—any way? I see none. A man whose sense of honour is so

delicate that you would exchange it for your own; who is the soul of truth, of honour, of nobility; who is—alas! alas! my friend—your brother Philip."

Then Venn took up his hat.

"I must go now," he said. "Shake hands, Arthur. Tell me again you think my little girl is pure and spotless."

"Before God I think so," said Arthur. "She is my sister."

"Thank you, friend. You shall see her. Now I go. I am bound on a pleasanter journey than when I came here. I am going to pay a little visit. Yes, you are quite right, I am going to Keppel-street. I am going to see the Scotch clergyman."

He put on his hat and went away.

He had not been gone half an hour before Philip himself came, radiant, happy, light-hearted. Some sinners are so. Then wise men say they live in Fools' Paradise. Perhaps; but I do not pretend to solve these difficulties. My own idea is that when a man has done such things as ought to take away all his self-respect, there is always some of it left so long as things are not found out. You can hardly expect self-respect in a gentleman who has stood in the dock, for

instance, and heard the judge pronouncing sentence, upon him. But the jury, how eminently self-respectful they are! One or two even, perhaps, of these might fairly stand side by side with the criminal. So, too—but I am plagiarizing from Venn's essay "On Being Found Out;" and as the world will perhaps get this work some day, I must stop.

Arthur looked the criminal, certainly; for he flushed scarlet, stammered, and refused to notice the hand that Philip held out.

"I have heard something, Philip."

"It must be something desperately solemn, then," said his brother. "Is it anything new about the—the late business of ours?"

"Nothing. It is much worse than that. Mr. Hartley Venn has been here."

Philip had, for the moment, utterly forgotten Venn's existence. He, too, changed colour.

"Well?"

"The rest you know, I suppose. Your wife—"

"Come, come, Arthur; be reasonable."

"I am reasonable. I say your wife—— Good heavens, sir, what makes a woman a wife? What are the laws of the country to the laws of honour, honesty, truth? Did you not pledge your faith to her? Did you not——"

"Arthur, I will not be questioned."

"Answer me, then, one question. You have done—you, Philip, you—you have done all that Venn has told me. Learn that your wife, my *sister-in-law*, is lying ill. She has been close to dying. You will, at least, make her your wife in the eyes of the law?"

"Oh, dear, no," said Philip, lightly. "I do not justify myself, my dear fellow. Of course it is extremely wicked and improper. I am very sorry to hear about her illness. Tell Mr. Venn that no money arrangement that is at all reasonable will be objected to—that——"

"Philip, stop—I won't hear it."

"Won't hear what? You were not born yesterday, I suppose, Arthur? You know that such things are done every day. We all do them."

"We all?"

"Yes—*we* all. Bah! the girl will get over it in a month."

"And this man is my own brother," said Arthur, recoiling—"is my own brother!"

Philip's face grew cloudy. There was no longer anything in him but the animal.

"Let us have no more of this nonsense," he said. "Tell this man Venn that he may do

what he likes, and go to the devil. And as for you, Arthur——"

"Philip, you are a villain. Leave my room. Never speak to me again, Never come here. Let me never see your face any more. You have disgraced the name you bear. We have been a family of gentlemen for generations. And now you are our representative! It is shameful—it is dreadful!"

Philip left him. As he opened the door, he turned and said—

"When you apologize to me for this language, you may, perhaps, expect to see me again. Till then, never."

It was a poor way of getting off the stage, and Philip afterwards reflected that he might have finished with at least more fire and effect if he had gone off swearing. But the best things always occur to us too late to put them into practice.

CHAPTER III.

"IT is indeed a dreadful story," said Madeleine, when Arthur told her.

"What is to be done? Advise me, Madeleine."

"Who can advise? Mr. Venn's plan of assuming the marriage to be legal, without asking any questions, and letting Philip alone altogether, seems the best; unless, which I very much doubt, we can bring your brother to a better frame of mind. You, of course, have done as much mischief as was possible. Men are always so violent."

"I told him he was a villain," said Arthur. "It is true. I have never read, never heard, of baser or more cold-blooded treachery."

"Let me go and see Philip," said Madeleine.

She went at once to the house at Notting-hill. It was now dismantled; for Philip had sent away everything but the furniture of the two rooms in which he lived. There was no one in the place but himself and an old woman. He had never been upstairs to the room which had been Laura's since she left him.

Madeleine found him, unshaven, in a dressing-gown, smoking a pipe, in gloomy disorder. It was in the afternoon. On the table was an empty soda-water bottle, an empty tumbler, and a brandy bottle.

Philip, surprised to see her, made some sort of apology for the general disorder, and putting aside his pipe, brushed the hair back from his forehead, and waited to hear what she would say.

She began by abusing him for living in such a mess.

"Why do you do it?" she asked. "Brandy and soda in the daytime—not dressed—rooms in the most dreadful litter. Philip, you ought to be ashamed of yourself."

He only groaned impatiently.

"Is that all you have come to see me for, Madeleine? Do not worry about the rooms and me. I've got something else to think of

besides the disorder of my rooms. You shall blow up the old woman if you like. She is within hail — probably sitting with her heels under the grate and her head in the coal-scuttle."

"I have a great deal more to say, Philip. First of all, do you know that I am going to be your sister? I am to marry Arthur."

"Arthur is a happy man, Madeleine. I envy him. But he always had all the luck."

"Don't call it luck, Phil. But we shall see a great deal more of you, shall we not, when we are married?"

"No—a great deal less. I have quarrelled with Arthur."

"I know, I know. But hasty words may be recalled, and—and hasty actions may be repaired, Phil, may they not?"

"If they could be undone, it would be worth talking about. Do not beat about the bush, Madeleine. I suppose you know all about that girl, and are come here to talk to me, and pitch into me. Well, go on. I cannot help what you say."

"Indeed, I do not come to pitch into you, as you call it, at all. I cannot bear to think that my own brother, my husband's brother, could

do this thing in cold blood. Do tell me something."

Philip was silent for a while.

"I will tell you the exact truth, Madeleine. You may call it excuse or defence, or anything else you like. It shall be the exact truth, mind. I would tell no other living soul. I care nothing for what the world says; but I care something for what you think.

"You cannot understand the nature of a man. You will not comprehend me when I tell you that I was devoured with love for this girl. There was nothing I could not have done—nothing, mind—to get possession of her. There came a time when I had to marry her on a certain day or not at all. I got the special licence, but forgot all about speaking to any clergyman till it was too late. Then MacIntyre pretended that he could marry us—and we were married. A fortnight ago I found myself a ruined man. Worse than ruined, for I had not money to meet my debts of honour. I was on the point of being disgraced. I was maddened by my difficulties. She understood nothing of them, never entered into my pursuits, cared nothing for my life. I was maddened by her calmness. Then I lost command of myself, and told her—what,

mind, I did not know till after—that the marriage was a mock one, and—and— Well, you know the rest. That is all."

"And your love for her, Philip?"

"My love? Gone—gone a long time ago. It was never more than a passing fancy, and all this business of the last fortnight put her out of my head entirely until Arthur reminded me of her. She is gone to her friend, guardian—what is it?—a Mr. Venn, who lives in chambers, and enacts the part of the universal philanthropist. I only keep on in this house, where it is torture to me to live, in order that he may not say I ran away from him. Here I am, and here I shall stay to face him—not to excuse myself, you understand. I stoop to defend my life to you alone."

"Philip, you are not so bad as he thinks. But I may tell you at once that he will not come. When Laura told him your name, she made him at the same time promise to do you no harm—to take no revenge on you."

"I am not afraid of that, Madeleine."

"No; but you need stay here no longer. She has gone for the present to live with Miss Venn. I am going to call upon her myself. I am anxious to make the acquaintance of Mrs. Durnford."

"Mrs. Durnford!"

"I am told that she is a young lady, very beautiful, very carefully educated, most sweet-tempered and affectionate."

"She is all that, Madeleine; but she never loved me. She was always pining after Mr. Venn. That reminds me—I told you I would give you the exact truth. I destroyed the letters that she wrote to him, without telling her. That was because I was jealous of him. I would have no man in her heart except myself. I am extremely sorry I did that, because it was an error of judgment, as well as a—"

"A wrong act, Phil, was it not?"

"It was, Madeleine—a dishonourable thing. Have I abased myself enough before you, or do you want more of the confessions of a man about town? I have lots more relating to other events in a riotous career. Would you like to hear them? By Jove! I wonder if the prodigal son ever beguiled the winter evenings, sitting round the fire, with tales of the things he had done? The name of the other son is not given in the original narrative, but I believe it was Arthur."

"No, Philip. I want no more confessions. I want an act of reparation. See, Phil," she

pleaded, "God only allows us to be happy in being good. Be good, my brother."

"I can't, Madeleine. I'm much too far gone."

"Then undo the evil you have done."

"How can that be?"

"I know you better than all the rest of them, Phil. I know that you are easily influenced, that you act without thinking, that you are easily moved, that your heart is not selfish. I know that you are repentant in spite of your light words. But think of the girl, Phil."

"I do think of her. I think of her day and night. I cannot sleep. I cannot do anything. She is always before my eyes."

"Then marry her, and take her back, if she would come."

"She would not, Madeleine. There was a look in her eyes when she left me that told me all was over. No woman can have that expression in her face, and ever come back to love and confidence. She would never come back."

"Then marry her, Phil. In the eyes of the law, at least, let her be your wife."

Philip was silent.

"I love her no longer," he said. "There can be no longer any question of love between us. But see, you shall do with me what you will,

Madeleine. Ask me anything for Laura, and you shall have it. Keep my story—keep what I have told you to yourself. Do not even tell it to Arthur."

"Philip, you promise?"

"I promise, Madeleine. Give me your hand. I swear by your hand—because there is nothing I know so sacred—that I will obey you in all things as regards Laura."

He kissed her fingers. Over his mobile countenance there passed the old expression of nobility, as if it had come back to settle there for good.

"And Arthur?" Madeleine began.

The bright look vanished.

"Arthur has used words to me—I have used words to Arthur—which can never be forgotten. Tell him so. I desire to meet him no more. Farewell, Madeleine. Write and tell me what I am to do, and I will do it. And let us part now, never to meet again. I do not know what I shall do with my future. Make ducks and drakes of it, I suppose. But I shall be out of my path. I shall be happy enough. The slopes that lead to Avernus are broad and pleasant. You may hear us singing as we go down them —you may see us dancing. Oh, it is a pleasant

life, the life I am going to lead. Good-bye, Madeleine."

She took his hand—his face was clouded and moody; and then, grateful for the promise she had got, she left him and drove back to her own house.

And the same day she, with Arthur, made a formal call upon Miss Venn. Sukey, little accustomed to visitors who came in their own carriage, was not above being flattered.

"We are not come wholly for the pleasure of seeing you, Miss Venn," said Madeleine. "I want to make the acquaintance of my future sister-in-law, Mrs. Durnford."

"Laura?" She looked curiously at Madeleine, but it was Arthur who was blushing. "Laura? She is in her own room. Would you like to go up and see her?"

"If I might. You are too kind, dear Miss Venn. May I go up by myself, without being announced?"

Sukey took her to the door and left her.

Madeleine gently opened it.

On the sofa by the fire, wrapped in a dressing-gown, lay a fair young girl, thin, pale, wasted. Her head was lying among the pillows, and she was asleep.

Madeleine bent over her, and kissed her.

She opened her eyes. She saw a tall and queenly woman in silks and sealskin, and half rose.

"Don't move, my dear," said Madeleine; "let me kiss you. I am to make your acquaintance. Shall I tell you who I am? I am Madeleine de Villeroy, and I used to know your husband when he was quite a boy. Now I am going to marry your husband's brother, and we shall be sisters. My child, you shall be made happy again. We shall all love you."

"My husband? He said—he said—"

"Forget what he said, my darling—forget all that he said, and, if you can, forgive him. Now, sit up, and let us talk."

She sat with her for a quarter of an hour, and then went away, promising to call again soon.

In the drawing-room there was rigid discomfort. For Sukey, the moment she got back, had seized the bull by the horns and attacked Arthur.

"You are the brother of Mr. Philip Durnford?" she began. "You are the brother of a bad man—a bad man, Mr. Arthur Durnford. Tell him not to come to this house, for I won't have him. Remember that—"

"Indeed, Miss Venn, he will not come here."

"If he does, Anne will take the tongs to him —I know she will. She did that much to a policeman in the kitchen. Tell him not to come."

"My brother and I, Miss Venn, are not on speaking terms at present."

"Indeed. I'm glad to hear it—I'm very glad to hear it."

Then they both relapsed into silence, and Sukey glared at poor Arthur, by way of conveying a lesson in virtue, till he nearly fell off the chair.

Madeleine relieved them; and, after asking Sukey's permission to come again, took away the unfortunate Arthur.

"Why didn't you ring for the sherry, miss?" asked Anne, presently coming upstairs.

"I gave it him, Anne—I gave it him well." Sukey shook her head virulently. "That was Laura's husband's brother. I told him if his precious brother came here you'd go at him—with the tongs, I said."

"So I would—so I would," said Anne.

"Sherry, indeed! They are always wanting to drink. We don't drink glasses of sherry all day. I dare say it was sherry drove that aban-

doned brother of his to bad courses. I hope, for that sweet girl's sake, he isn't like his brother. He doesn't look it, Anne; but you never can tell. They are all alike—waste, drink, eat, and devour. Why isn't the world peopled with nothing but women?"

"'Deed, then, miss," replied Anne, "the end of the world wouldn't be very far off."

CHAPTER IV.

MR. MACINTYRE is sitting in his easy chair at home, in those respectable lodgings of his in Keppel-street. He is meditating on the good fortune that has come to him. Perhaps he is too much inclined to attribute his success to merit rather than for-

tune; but in this we may pardon him. It is but two o'clock in the day, but a glass of steaming whisky toddy is on the table, and a pipe in his mouth. In spite of the many virtues which adorned this great man, I fear that the love of material comfort caused him sometimes to anticipate the evening, the legitimate season of comfort.

Nursing his leg, and watching the wreaths of smoke curling over his head, he meditated. And if his thoughts had taken words, they would have been much as follows:—

"After all my shipwrecks, behold a haven. I have been in prison. I have been scourged by schoolboys. I have been tried for embezzlement. I have starved in the streets of London. I have been usher, preacher, missionary, tutor, retailer, sandwich man. I have at last found the road to fortune; not by honest means, but by lies and villainies, by practising on the honour of others. I have five thousand pounds in the bank, eleven pounds ten shillings and threepence in my pocket. Nothing can hurt me now; nothing can annoy me but ill-health and the infirmities of age. I have ten years, at least, of life before me yet. I shall go back to my own people. The Baillie will hardly refuse

to receive me now that I have money. I shall be respected and respectable. 'Honesty is the best policy!" Bah! it is the maxim of the successful. I know better. Cleverness is the best policy. Scheme, plunder, purloin, cheat, and devise. When your fortune is made, hold out your clean white hands, and say—'Christian brethren, I am a living example that honesty is the best policy.' I shall join this band; and at the kirk on the Sawbath, and among my folk on week days, I shall be a living sermon to the young of the advantages of honesty. Respected and respectable, Alexander MacIntyre, retire upon your modest gains, and be happy."

Just then a knock was heard at the door.

The visitor was no other than Hartley Venn. He had strolled leisurely from Arthur's lodgings, smoking all the way, with a smile of immeasurable content, and a sweet emotion of anticipation in his heart. Having once ascertained the address of the philosopher, he lost no time in making his way to the street. On the way he stopped at a shop and bought a gutta-percha whip, choosing one of considerable weight, yet pliant and elastic.

"This," he said to the shopman, "would curl

well round the legs, in tender places, I should think?"

"I should think it would," said the man.

"Yes; and raise great weals where there was plenty of flesh, I should say. Thank you. Good morning. It will suit me very well."

He poised the instrument in his hand, and walked along. When he got to Keppel-street, he showed his knowledge of human nature by going to the nearest public-house, and asking for Mr. MacIntyre's number. The potboy knew it.

Hartley presented himself unannounced, and with a bow of great ceremony—one of those Oriental salutations which were reserved for great occasions: he had not used it since his last interview with the Master of his college.

"I believe I have the honour of addressing Mr. Alexander MacIntyre," he began.

The tutor confessed to owning the name, and began to feel a little uneasy. However, he asked his visitor to take a chair.

"Thank you—no, Mr. MacIntyre. Shall we say the Reverend Alexander MacIntyre?"

"No."

"We will not. The business I have to transact will not detain me long, and will be better

done standing. You are, I believe, acquainted with Philip Durnford?"

"I am. May I ask—"

"Presently—presently. You are likewise acquainted with Mrs. Philip Durnford?"

It was MacIntyre's chance, but he neglected it.

"The young person calling herself Mrs. Philip Durnford has, I believe, run away from him."

Venn gave a start, but restrained himself.

"One more question. You have often, I doubt not, reflected on the wisdom of that sentence of Horace, which might be inspired were it not the result of a world's experience. In that sense, too, you would perhaps urge, and very justly, that it might be considered as divine, since experience is a form of revelation. I offer you a paraphrase, perhaps too alliterative—

'Lightly the sinner leaps along the way,
Lamely limps after he who bears the cane;
Yet, soon or late, there comes the fatal day
When stick meets back, and joy is drowned by pain.'"

"Go on, sir," said Mr. MacIntyre, seriously alarmed, "and let me know your business. Who are you? What have you to do with me? I have never set my eyes on you before."

"Do not let us precipitate matters. Patience, Mr. MacIntyre, patience. Although you have

not seen me, you have perhaps heard of me from Mrs. Philip Durnford. I am her guardian. My name, sir, is Hartley Venn."

The philosopher, among whose prominent defects was a want of physical courage, fell back in his chair, and began to perspire at the nose.

"Having learned from my ward the facts of the case—that you exercised practices undoubtedly your legal right in Scotland, and married her to Durnford by a special licence in this very room; also, that you suppressed the letter she sent me; and, further, that you have been the prime agent and adviser in the whole of the business—it was but natural that I should desire to make your acquaintance. In fact," he added, with a winning smile, "I really must confess that I had imagined your breed to be now totally extinct—gone out with the Regent, and belonging chiefly to the novels of his period. For this mistake I humbly beg permission to apologize. I obtained your address partly from Arthur Durnford, an admirer of yours—I wish I could say follower—and partly from the potboy who supplies your modest wants. I hope you will remember the claim of gratitude which that potboy will henceforth have upon you. I had a struggle in my own mind — διανδιχα μερμήριζον;

for while I ardently desired to converse with you myself, I had yet a feeling that the—the penalty should be left to some meaner person. But I bore in mind the distinction of rank. You are, I believe, a graduate of some University?"

"Sir, you are addressing a Master of Arts of the Univairsity of Aberdeen."

"Aberdeen is honoured. I wish we had had you at Cambridge."

Venn took the riding whip in both hands, passing his fingers up and down tenderly. MacIntyre saw now what was coming, and looked vainly round the room for a means of escape. Before him stood his tormentor. Behind the tormentor was the door. It is cruel, if you are to hang a man, first to stick him on a platform for an hour or so and harangue him; but perhaps, in the cases of lighter punishment, the suspense should be considered a part of the suffering. This was in MacIntyre's mind, but he did not give it utterance, sitting crouched in the chair, looking at the whip with a terrible foreboding.

Venn went on moralizing in a dreadful way, suggesting the confidence of one who knows that his game is fairly caught.

"The chastisement I am about to bestow upon you, Mr. MacIntyre, is ludicrously dispro-

portionate to the offence you have committed. You will reflect upon this afterwards, and laugh. On the highest Christian grounds, I ought, perhaps, to forgive you; and I dare say I shall, if I know how, after this interview. On the other hand, I have little doubt that the slight horse-whipping I shall give you will be considered by the powers leniently, perhaps even approvingly. Let me for once consider myself an Instrument."

He raised his whip above his head. MacIntyre crouched down, with his face in his hands.

"I beg your pardon," said Venn, pausing, "I have something else to say. You will remark that I have passed over the question of disgrace. No disgrace, I imagine, could possibly touch you, unless it were accompanied by severe personal discomfort. It is this curious fact—by the way, do you think it has received the attention it deserves?—which leads me to believe in the material punishments of the next world. You will remark—I do hope I make myself sufficiently clear, and am not tedious."

"Ye are tedious," groaned the philosopher, looking up.

"I mean, there comes upon a man, in the development of a long course of crime and sin—

say such a man as yourself—a time when no disgrace can touch him, no dishonour can be felt, no humiliation make him lower than he actually is. He has lost not only all care about the esteem of others, but also all sense of self-respect. He is now all body and mind—no soul. Therefore, Mr. MacIntyre, when a man reaches this stage, on which I imagine that you are yourself standing now, what is left for him? How, I mean, can you get at him? I see no way of attacking his intellect, and there remains then but one way—this!"

Quick as lightning, with a back stroke of his hand, Venn sent the whip full across MacIntyre's face. He leaped to his feet with a yell of pain and fear, and sprang to the door. But Venn caught him, as he passed, by the collar; and then, first pushing the table aside, so as to have a clear stage, he held him firmly out by the left hand—Mr. MacIntyre was but a small man, and perfectly unresisting—and with the right administered a punishment which, if I were Mr. Kingsley, I should call grim and great. Being myself, and not Mr. Kingsley, I describe the thrashing which Mr. Venn administered as at once calm, judicial, and severe. A boatswain would not have laid on the cuts with more

judgment and dexterity, so as at once to find out all the tender places, and to get the most out of the simple instrument employed.

But it was interrupted; for, hearing the door open, Venn turned round, and saw a lady standing in the room watching him. He let go his hold, and MacIntyre instantly dropped upon the floor, and lay there curled in a heap.

A lady of middle age, with pale face and abundant black hair, dressed in comely silks. For a moment, Venn thought he knew her face, but dismissed the idea.

"Mr. MacIntyre?" she asked, hesitatingly.

"He is here, madam," replied Hartley, indicating with the whip the recumbent mass beneath him.

The lady looked puzzled.

"I am extremely sorry your visit should be so ill-timed," said Hartley, politely. "The fact is, you find our friend in the receipt of punishment. His appearance at this moment is not dignified—not that with which a gentleman would prefer to see a lady in his rooms. Perhaps, if your business is not urgent, you would not mind postponing your call till to-morrow, when he may be able to receive you

with more of the outward semblance of self-respect. We have not yet quite finished."

"Don't go," murmured the prostrate sage.

Venn spoke calmly, but there was a hot flush upon his cheeks which spoke of intense excitement.

"Pray, madam, leave us for a few moments together—I am still in high spirits."

"I prefer ye in low spirits."

This was the voice of MacIntyre, lying still crouched with his face in his hands.

"Really, sir," said the visitor, "I think I ought to remain. Whatever Mr. MacIntyre has done, you have surely punished him enough."

"I think not," said Venn. "As you are apparently a friend—perhaps a believer in Mr. MacIntyre—I will tell you what he has done."

He told her, in a few words.

The lady looked troubled.

"The other one, you observe, madam, a young fellow of six and twenty, had still some grains left of morals and principle—they were sapped by Mr. MacIntyre; he had still the remains of honour—they were removed by Mr. MacIntyre; he still called himself a gentleman—he can do so no longer, thanks to Mr. MacIntyre. Do you want to hear more?"

"And the girl—where is she?"

"She is with me, madam. She is my ward."

"Perhaps, sir, Mr. MacIntyre would get up, if he were assured that there was no more personal violence intended."

Mr. MacIntyre shook a leg to show that he concurred in this proposition, and was prepared to listen to these terms.

"Get up," said Venn, sternly.

He slowly rose, his face and hands a livid mass of bruises and weals, and staggered to his feet. His coat was torn. His eyes were staring. His face, where the whip had not marked it, was of a cold, white colour. He stood for a moment stupidly gazing at Venn, and then turned to the lady. For a moment he gazed at her indifferently, then curiously, then he stepped forward and stared her in the face; and then he threw up his arms over his head, and would have fallen forward, but Venn caught him, as he cried—

"Marie!"

They laid him on the floor, and poured cold water on his forehead. Presently he revived and sat up. Then they gave him a glass of brandy, which he drank, and staggered to his feet. But he reeled to and fro, like unto one who goes down upon the sea in a great ship.

"It is Marie," said the lady. "It is more than five and twenty years since we met last. You were bad then—you are worse now. Tell me what new villainy is this that you have committed?"

"Marie!" he began, but stopped again, and turned to Venn. "Sir, you do not understand. Some day you will be sorry for this outrage upon a respectable clergyman, who cannot retaliate, because his cloth forbids. Let me go and restore myself."

He slipped into the back room, his bed-room, and they saw him no more. Had they looked out of the window, they might have seen him slip from the door, with a great-coat about him and a carpet-bag in his hand, his face muffled up and his hat over his eyes. He got round the corner, and calling a cab, drove straight to his bank.

"Can I help you in any way, madam?"

"I called here to ask for the address of a Mr. Philip Durnford."

"That at least I can procure for you. For Mr. Philip Durnford is none other than the man of whom I have spoken."

She sat on a chair, and answered nothing for awhile.

He, wondering, looked on silent.

"Oh, there must be a mistake. Philip would never do it. Oh, Philip, my son, my son!"

The words seemed extorted by the agony of sharp pain.

"Your son?" cried Hartley.

"Ay, my son. Let the world know it now. Let it be published in all the papers, if they will. My son, my son!"

Then she seemed to regain her composure.

"Sir, you have the face of a gentleman."

"That must be the Bishop's doing," murmured Venn, "not the glue man."

But she did not hear him.

"You may, perhaps, keep a secret—not altogether mine. I am Madame de Guyon—yes, the singer. I am a native of Palmiste. Philip Durnford is my son."

Venn sat down now, feeling as if everything was going round with him.

And here let me finish off with Mr. MacIntyre, from whom I am loath to part.

His lodgings knew him no more. The things he left behind paid for the rent due. He drove to the City, drew out all his money in drafts on an Edinburgh bank, and went down to Scotland that very night by the limited mail. As

soon as his face was restored to its original shape and hue, he went to his native town and took a small house there, after an interview with the Baillie, his cousin, who, finding that he had a large sum to deposit in the bank, received him with cordiality, and even affection.

He lives there still, respected by the town, as is right for one who left the country and returned with money. He is consulted on all matters of finance, speculation, education, doctrine, morals, and church discipline. He holds views perhaps too rigid, and his visitations on minor offences are sometimes more severe than the frailty of the flock can altogether agree with. He is never seen drunk, though it is notorious that he drinks a good many tumblers of toddy every evening. He spends the mornings in his garden—a pursuit which has always attracted great men in retirement; and on wet days in his study, where he is supposed to be elaborating a grand work on metaphysics. In conversation he is apt to deal too exclusively with principles of an abstract nature; and his friends complain that, considering he has been so great a traveller, he tells so few tales of his own experiences. Palmiste Island he never mentions. As for the story of his life, no one knows it but himself,

and no single episode has ever got down to his native town. In all probability he will go on, as he said himself, respected and respectable, till the end—a living example of the truth of the proverb that "Honesty is the best policy."

CHAPTER V.

MARIE, when she told George Durnford that she had a great voice, spoke less than the truth. She had a magnificent voice; a voice that comes but once or twice a century; a voice that history remembers, and that marks an epoch in the annals of music. With the money that Durnford gave her, she devoted herself to its cultivation. She did not hurry. In Italy she studied long and diligently, until, at the age of six and twenty, she was able to make her first appearance in London. She had hoped to please her old lover, and interest him in her success; but he answered hardly any of her letters, and only coldly acquiesced in her schemes for the future. For George Durnford's love had long disappeared from his heart: it

vanished when he married Adrienne. He looked on poor Marie as a living witness of a time that he repented. He wanted, having assured her against poverty, neither to hear from her nor to see her again. He was fated not to see her; and when she wrote to him, telling of the great success of her first appearance, he tore the letter into shreds, and inwardly hoped that she would never come back to Palmiste. It is not exactly cowardice, this sort of feeling; nor is it wholly shame. It is, perhaps, the feeling that prompts one to put away all signs and remembrances of sickness and suffering. We do not like to be reminded of it. There are thousands of respectable, godly, pure-minded fathers and husbands who have a sort of skeleton in the closet, hid away and locked up, as it were, in their brain, not to be lightly disturbed. In providing for Marie and taking charge of her son, Mr. Durnford had done, he thought, enough. There was no longer any possibility of love—let there be no longer any friendship. And so her letters worried and irritated him, and his answers grew colder and shorter. From time to time he read in the papers of her success. Madame de Guyon appeared at the Italian Opera. She

was described as of French descent—some said from Martinique; none thought of Palmiste. She was said to be a young and strikingly beautiful widow. Her reputation was absolutely blameless; her name was widely spread about for those graceful deeds of charity which singers can do so well. And when, after a few years of the theatre, she withdrew altogether from the stage, and it was stated that henceforth she would only sing at oratorios and at concerts, everybody said that it was just the thing that was to be expected of a singer so good, so charitable, and so pious.

He once wrote to her, advising her to marry again; nor did he ever understand the bitter pain his letter caused her.

For women are not as men. It seems to me that women can only give themselves wholly and entirely to one man. To other men they may be thoughtful, and even tender; but one woman is made for one man, and when she loves she loves once and for all. Marie had told her old lover that she loved him no more—that what had been could never come again. *It was not true.* What had been might at any time have come over again. The old idol of her heart was not shattered. It was erect, and

stronger than ever—strengthened by the thought of her boy; fostered by the memories which ran like a rivulet through the waste and loneliness of her life, filling it with green things and summer flowers; and held in its place by that constancy of woman which is proof against time, and circumstance, and absence, and neglect. George Durnford loved her no longer. He did not, it is true, understand her. That magnificent nature, which had been like some wild forest plant, unchecked in its luxuriance, when he knew it best, was developed by training and sorrow to one of the most perfect types of womanhood. What more splendid than the full maturity of her beauty when she swept across the stage? What more perfect than the full rich tones of a voice that thrilled all listeners as she sang? And what—could he only have known it—more precious than the riches of the thoughts which welled up in her mind with no listener to impart them to, no husband to share them? But George Durnford died; and only when she heard of his death was she conscious of the space he occupied in her mind. She saw it in the papers; for no one wrote to her, or knew of her existence. Then she got the Palmiste papers, and read first of his funeral, and

the fine things that were said about him, and then of his will; and next she saw the names of the two boys as passengers to England. And presently she began to live again, for she hoped to meet her boy, and—after many days—to reveal herself to him, and get back some of the love she lavished upon him in imagination. She did not hurry. She preferred, for many reasons, to bide her time. First, because she thought him ignorant of his birth; secondly, she thought that it would be better to wait till he was a man, and could better bear what would certainly be a bitter blow—the stigma of his birth; and, lastly, she was afraid. George Durnford had said but little about him. He was growing tall and handsome; he was strong and clever; he was a bold rider and a good shot. All this she learned from his letters, but nothing more. In the last letter he had ever written to her, he mentioned that Philip was going into the army. And after some time she bought an Army List, and read with ecstasy the name of her son in the list of ensigns. She never attempted to see him, but she saved her money—she had made a good deal of money by this time—and laid it out judiciously for the future benefit of her son. If Philip had only known!

She lived in her own house, near Regent's Park, where she saw but few friends, and those chiefly of her own profession. Her life was not dull, however. It was brightened by the hope that lived in her. Morning and evening she prayed for her son; all day long she thought about him; at night she dreamed of him. She pictured him brave, clever, and handsome; she made him her knight—young Galahad, without stain or blemish of sin; and she trembled at the thought of meeting him—not for fear he might fall below the standard she had set up, but for fear of her own unworthiness. She was to go to him, some day, with the bitter confession of his mother's sin. She was to say, "You are separated from other men by a broad line. They may rejoice in their mothers—you must be ashamed of yours." She was to ask him, not for that love and respect which wives can get from their sons, but for love, and pity, and forgiveness. She was to blight his self-respect and abase her own. No wonder that she hesitated, and thought, year after year, that there was time enough.

But one day, looking at the familiar page in the Army List, she saw that her son's name was missing, and on looking through the *Gazette* she

found that he had sold out. This agitated her. Something must have happened. He had abandoned his career. He might have married. How could she face his wife? Or he had met with some misfortune. How could she ascertain what? She did not know what to do or to whom to apply. The weeks passed on. She was in great anxiety. At last, unable to bear any longer the suspense of doubt, she went to a private inquiry office, and set them to work to find Mr. Durnford's address. It was quite easy to ascertain where he had lodged before he sold out, but impossible to learn where he was now; only the lodging-house people gave the address of his friend, Mr. MacIntyre, and his cousin, Arthur Durnford. This was all she wanted. Of the two, she would first try MacIntyre. She knew him of old. He was unscrupulous, she well knew, and still poor, as she suspected. She would bribe him to give her Philip's address, unless he would do it for nothing.

All this is by way of explanation of her sudden appearance at a moment so inopportune, when dignity was utterly out of the question, and her old acquaintance showed to such singularly small advantage.

The shock of Venn's intelligence was for the moment too much for her.

"I fear I have hurt you," said Hartley. "Pardon me, I was careless of my words. Did I understand him rightly? He said that—that—"

"Where is he?" asked Marie. "Bring him here."

Venn opened the door of the bed-room and looked in, but no one was there.

"He is gone, madam. Pray let me be of assistance to you. I can give you Mr. Durnford's address. It is at Notting-hill that he lives."

"Stay. First, the young lady you spoke of, sir—your ward. Could I see her?"

Venn hesitated.

"She is ill—she has just lost her husband. Would it do any good if you were to see her?"

Marie looked him straight in the face.

"I have not seen Philip Durnford for twenty-five years, and I am his mother." She blushed like a girl. "It is twenty-seven years ago," she murmured. "I am a native of the Palmiste Island."

"Good God!" said Venn, thinking of Arthur.

"I put my story into your hands, though I do not even know your name. You may, if you please, publish to the world the shame and dis-

grace of a woman that the world has always believed pure and good. But I think you will not do that."

"I?" cried Venn. "Great heavens! why should I? My name is Venn, Madame de Guyon. My father was Mr. George Durnford's tutor, and I am a friend of Arthur Durnford. My ward—the little girl that I brought up and made a lady of—is the grand-daughter of my old laundress. Your son made her acquaintance—and—it is best to let you know the whole truth—made her promise to hide the fact from me; brought her here to these very rooms, one evening six months ago, when MacIntyre married, pretended to marry them—I don't know which. Then he took her to France. She will tell you the rest, perhaps, herself."

"Advise me what is best to do," cried Marie, in deep distress. "Oh, sir, if I have but found my son to lose him again!"

"At all events, you shall see his wife," said Venn. "You will be very kind to her? Yes, I see you will. But there are other complications."

Then he told the story of the transferred property, just as he had heard it from Arthur an hour before.

"But I was never married," said Marie, simply.

"Then Mr. MacIntyre, who is really a scoundrel of quite the ancient type, and, as one may say, of the deepest dye, has been forging the letters; and we shall, perhaps, have the pleasure of seeing him in the felon's dock before long."

"Promise me again," cried Marie, alarmed, "that you will keep my secret, whatever happens."

"I have promised already," said Venn. "Not even Arthur Durnford shall hear a word. But it seems a pity to let the MacIntyre go."

"Then take me to your ward," Marie asked him.

"She is staying at my sister's house. Do not tell my sister, if you see her, anything. She is a most excellent woman, Madame de Guyon, and as silent as death on unimportant matters; but in the matter of secrets I believe she is too confiding. She imparts in confidence all that is entrusted to her in confidence, and considers she has kept a secret when she has not proclaimed it at church. Just now, however, she is not likely to be inquisitive, because she is greatly excited at being excommunicated."

"Excommunicated?"

"Yes; she gave her cat the name of St. Cyril. On her refusal to change it, her clergy-

man, who holds rigid views, has excommunicated her. It is the greatest excitement that has ever happened to her, and she attends all those ordinances of religion from which she is debarred by her own director at an adjacent Low Church, where the clergyman parts his hair at the side, wears long whiskers, and reads the prayers with solemnity and effect. But I beg your pardon, Madame de Guyon, for inflicting these family details upon you. Let me get a cab for you."

He returned in a few minutes, and they drove to Miss Venn's house. His sister was out. As he afterwards learned, there had been a prayer meeting at the Evangelical clergyman's school; and as nothing irritated the Rev. Mr. De Vere so much as a public prayer meeting, she went there ostentatiously. By the greatest good luck, he was passing as she went in, and saw her, so that she enjoyed her meeting extremely.

Laura was lying on a sofa, reading. Her pale cheeks brightened up when Hartley came in.

"What is my ward doing?" he asked. "Not reading too long, I hope. I have brought you a visitor, Lollie. Madame de Guyon, this is my ward, Mrs. Philip Durnford."

Laura looked appealingly at Hartley; but was more astonished when Marie went straight to the sofa, and kneeling down, took her face in her hands and kissed her, with tears in her eyes.

"I had better leave you, Madame de Guyon, I think," said Venn. "I shall wait in the dining-room for you."

Left alone, Marie began to tremble.

"My dear, I ought not to have kissed you. I ought, first, to tell you who I am."

"Who are you?" asked Laura. "I am sure, at least, you are very kind."

"My dear child, I hear that you have suffered. I want, if I can, to soothe your sorrow, and, if it be possible, remove it."

"Ah, no one can."

"We shall see. Have you patience to listen to the story of a woman who has also suffered—but through her own fault; while you have only suffered through the fault of others?"

She told her own story. How poor and ignorant she had been; how George Durnford had made her proud and happy with a love of which she realized all the passion and happiness and none of the guilt; how he had told her, one day, that it was to be in future as if they had

never met; how he had taken her boy, at her own request, and given her money to come to England; and how she had studied long and hard, and learned to make the most of a gift which is granted to few. And then her voice softened as she told how she had made fame and got fortune, and toiled on companionless, cheered by the hope that some day she might find her son, and pour into his heart some of the love with which her own was bursting.

"My dear," she said, "I found not my son, but his evil adviser—not his friend—Mr. MacIntyre. And my son is your husband."

Laura buried her face in her hands.

"Yes, I know it all. Mr. Venn has told me. Only, dear, you are not to blame. You are a wife—I never was. Let me find in you what I have lost. If I cannot win my son, let me win a daughter."

"Oh, madame," Laura replied, stroking back the thick brown hair that covered her face, "you are a lady, I am only a poor girl. How Philip could ever love me—he did love me once—I do not know. I am only Mr. Venn's little girl, and you are the only lady, except Miss Venn and Madeleine, who has ever spoken to me at all."

"My dear, and I was only a singer at the theatre."

"But you are a great singer. And I—oh, madame!—and what will Philip say?"

"We will not care what Philip says."

"And then—oh! I am so unhappy!"

And she began to cry.

Marie cried too; and the two found consolation in the usual way.

Then Laura began to whisper.

"You have had some comfort—you had a child."

"We will get you back your husband. Philip cannot be very bad, dear. He loved you once, at any rate."

She brightened up; but the moment after fell back upon the sofa, and burst into fresh tears.

"I shall never get him back. I *could* never see him again. You do not know what he called me—me, his wife. I *am* his wife, am I not? I could never look Mr. Venn in the face again if I were not."

"Yes, dear, you are his wife, surely you are. But I will go and see him."

"Take Mr. Venn with you. Let him speak for me."

"Would it be wise? No—I will go alone. If he will not hear me, he will certainly not hear Mr. Venn. And now, I must go. But dear, my heart is very heavy. I am oppressed with a sense of coming evil. Tell me—if Philip, if my son, should not receive me well, if, after all these years of forbearance, he greets me with coldness and distrust—oh, tell me what he is like!"

Laura told her as well as she could.

"But Philip is passionate," she concluded, "and I think he has lost some money lately, and Mr. MacIntyre makes him do reckless things."

"I can manage Mr. MacIntyre," said Marie. "Besides, he is not likely to forget the lesson Mr. Venn has taught him to-day."

"What was that?"

Marie told her of the scene she had witnessed.

Laura, usually the mildest of her sex, set her lips together, and clasped her hands.

"Oh, I am so glad—I am so glad! Was he hurt? Did he cry? Tell me all over again," she said.

Marie only smiled.

"Let me finish, dear. I have only one pro-

position to make to my son. If he will not agree to that, I have one to make to you."

"What is that?"

"Would you like to go back to Philip?"

She clasped her hands, and began to think.

"He was so cruel. If I only could. If he would only take me. But I *am* his wife."

"And if he will not, will you come with me, child? My heart is empty, I long for some one to love. Come with me, and be my loved and cherished daughter."

Laura threw her fair young arms round her neck, and Marie kissed her passionately.

"I must go now," she said, after a few minutes. "I do not think I can go to your husband's—to my son's house to-day. I must wait till to-morrow. Write down his address, dear, on my tablets. And now, good-bye. Ask Miss Venn to let me come to see you. Tell her only that I am your husband's old friend; and remember to keep my secret till I see you again."

She went away. Presently came back Miss Venn, in a high state of exhilaration at the discomfiture of the Rev. Mr. De Vere, who, seeing her open act of rebellion, must have gone home, she concluded, in a furious state of in-

dignation. This, indeed, the reverend gentleman had actually done. And she called loudly for St. Cyril—her cat—and sat down and made herself comfortable; and gave her brother a comfortable little dinner.

CHAPTER VI.

"WE have not had a Chorus for a long time," said Venn. "All these excitements have been too much for us. Sit down, Arthur. Jones, consider this a regular night."

"I have been reading," said Jones, presently, "with a view to understanding the great secret of success, some of the poetry of the period. And I beg to submit to the Chorus a ballad done in the most approved fashion of our modern poets. May I read it? It is called 'The Knightly Tryste,' or, if you will, 'My Ladye's Bidding,' which is more poetical :—

'Between the saddle and the man,
Ah me! red gleams of sunlight ran;
He only, on his Arab steed,
Left all the streaming winds behind.
Sighed, "Well it were, in time of need,
A softer place than this to find."

The twinkling milestones at his side,
Flashed for a moment as he passed;
Small thought had he of joy or pride,
Groaned only, "This can never last."
And more and more the red light ran
Between the saddle and the man.

"Woe worth the day," he gasped by times,
"My lady fair this fancy took;
And devil take her prattling rhymes
About the willows and the brook.
For this I suffer what I can,
Between the saddle and the man."

Still rode the knight: the dewy beads
Stood on his brow, but on he spurred;

Ere compline bell doth ring it needs
He meet the lady by her word;
And great discomfort then began
Between the saddle and the man.

There came a moment—o'er a gate,
Five-barred, close shut, the destrier flew;
He also—but his knees, too late,
Clutched only mosses wet with dew.
Ah, me! the ever-lengthening span
Between the saddle and the man.'"

Jones read and looked round for applause. None followed.

"It won't do, Jones," said Venn—"it won't do. You had better stick to the old school. The grotesque and the unreal won't last. Write for posterity, if you must write poetry."

"I don't care so much for posterity as I did," said Jones. "I want things that pay. Now, I really think an able editor ought to give something for those lines."

"Low and grovelling aim! Look at me—I write for nothing but the praise of my fellow-countrymen, as soon as I can get published."

"I sometimes think," Jones continued, "of taking up the satirical line. Are you aware that there is not such a thing as a satirist

living? We want a Boileau. The nation asks for a man of sense. Something must be done soon."

For once Jones looked melancholy.

"What is it, Jones?" asked Venn. "More disappointments. Remember the banquet of life, my boy?"

"I do," said Jones, with an effort to smile. "In the words of Hannah More—

> 'For bread and cheese and little ease
> Small thanks, but no repining,
> Still o'er the sky they darkling lie—
> Clouds, with no silver lining.'

Come," he went on, "the Chorus is unusually dull and silent. I will sing you a song made for the occasion:—

> 'I am an unfortunate man,
> Bad luck at my elbow doth sit,
> Let me tell how my troubles began,
> If only my feelings permit.
>
> The spoon that my young lips adorn'd,
> In infancy's hour was of wood,
> No freaks, then, of fortune I mourn'd,
> And for pap it was equally good.
>
> To school I was sent, and the first day
> I was caned with the rest by mistake;

But each morning that followed, the worst day
Seemed still in my annals to make.

For I laughed when I should have been weeping,
I cried when I ought to have smiled;
And the painful results still are keeping
Their memory green in this child.

The other boys sinned at their leisure,
They could do what they liked and escape;
But I, for each illicit pleasure,
Still found myself in a new scrape.

Now in London I linger, and sadly
Get shoved on my pathway by fate.
Hope dances before me, and madly
Shows fruits that are only a bait.

For I am an unfortunate man;
But fate, which has taken the rest,
Has given, to console when she can,
Good spirits still left in my breast.'"

"That's not very good, Jones," said Lynn. "What has put you into this dejected and miserable frame, unfit for the society of a decent and philosophical Chorus? First you read a bad poem, and then you sing a comic song."

"A letter I got this morning," he answered, with a groan. "Let me talk, you fellows, and I'll tell you a story. Call it a vision if you like —a vision of two lives.

"The two lives were once one. They thought the same thoughts and had the same ambitions. They had the same chances, they won the same successes, dreamed the same dreams. No two friends were ever so close, for the two minds were one, and dwelt in the same body. I saw in my vision that there came a time—the boy was almost grown to the age of manhood—when the two separated. It was at Oxford that this disunion first took place. And in my vision it seemed to me that the one which remained in the boy was as myself, and the other—that other self which I might have been."

Jones paused, and pondered for a few moments, with grave face.

"Yes, I—that is, the one that remained behind—was seized with a kind of madness of vanity. All my noble dreams, all my thoughts of what might be, gave way to a desire to amuse. I, that is—of course—"

"Go on saying I, without apology," said Venn.

"Well, I succeeded in amusing the men of my college. I succeeded as an actor—I think I was a good mimic. I sang, I made verses, I wrote little plays and acted them. I went every day to wines, suppers, and breakfasts. I was, of

course, tremendously poor; and, like most poor idiots, did no reading whatever. Meantime, my old friend was very differently occupied. I used to see his calm, quiet face—like mine in features, but different in expression—in hall and chapel. He was a student. He came up to Oxford with ambitions and hopes that I shared; but he kept them, and worked for them. Mine, with the means of realizing them, I had thrown away. I used to look at him sometimes, and ask myself if this was the friend who had once been the same as myself, like the two branches of an equation in Indeterminate Co-efficients."

"Jones," said Venn, "don't be flowery, pray don't. We are not mathematical men."

"The time came when we were to go into the schools. I, my friends, in my vision, was plucked. He, in my vision, got a Double First. Curiously enough, in reality I *was* plucked in Greats—for divinity. However, after this we took paths even more divergent. He stayed behind to try for a Fellowship, which he easily got. I went up to London to try to get my daily bread in any way, however humble. He entered at the bar—it had always been our ambition to become Fellows, and to enter at the bar—I became a drudge to an army cram

coach, who. paid me just enough to keep me going.

"He, too, a year or two later, came to London. How long is it? I think it is ten years since we took our degrees — and read law. Presently he was called—I saw his name in the Law List—and began to get practice. I, like a stone, neither grew nor moved.

"The time goes on; but the two lives are separated, never again to meet. He is on the road to fortune and fame. He will make his mark on the history of his country. He will—that is, after all, the cruelest part of the vision—he will marry Mary. For while the boy was growing into manhood, there came to live in the village where his father, the vicar, lived, a retired officer, with a little daughter eight years younger than the boy. The boy, who had no playfellows in the village, took to the child, and became a sort of elder brother to her. And, as they grew up, the affection between the two strengthened. Mary was serious beyond her years, chiefly from always associating with her seniors. When she was twelve and the boy eighteen, she could share his hopes, and could understand his dreams. She looked on him as a hero. Like all women with those they love, she could not

see his faults; and when he disappointed all their expectations, and came back from the grand University that was to make so much of him, disgraced instead of honoured, loaded with debt instead of armed with a Fellowship, she it was who first forgave him.

"He could not forgive himself. He handed her over mentally to his old friend, and left her."

"But he will see her again," said Arthur.

"I think never. He has had his chance, that would have made them both happy, and he threw it away. My friend, however, who must be making a very large income by this time at the Chancery bar, who writes critical papers in big words in the *Fortnightly*, whose book on something or other connected with the law is quoted by judges—he will doubtless marry her, and then they will be happy. But I—I mean the ego of my vision—shall go on struggling with the world, and rejoicing over small sacrifices, resigned to great disappointments, till the end of the chapter. I shall contemplate the visionary happiness of my alter ego—with Mary, whom I shall never see again. He will be Lord Chancellor; and, if I live long enough, when I die I shall think of the great works that

he has done, and thank God for his excellent gift of a steady purpose and a clear brain."

Jones was silent for a few minutes.

"You were talking about women the other night—three months ago. It makes me angry to hear theories of women. I beg your pardon, Venn, for criticizing your trumpet-noses; and yours, Lynn, for getting savage over your world of the future. Women are what men make them; and if my Mary had married the future Lord Chancellor, there would have been no nobler woman in the world, as there is now none more tender-hearted and forgiving. But—oh dear me!—if women are frivolous, it is because they have nothing to do. To make them work is to unsex them; to put them through a Cambridge course of mathematics is so ludicrously absurd in its uselessness, that we need no vision of an impossible future world to show us its folly."

"And suppose, Jones," said Arthur—"only suppose, that Mary marries the 'I' of your dream."

"I can't suppose it. He cannot drag her down to his own level."

"But she may raise him to hers."

Jones sighed. In his vision of the two lives

he had revealed the story of his own—which Venn already partly knew; and the dignity of sorrow for a moment sat like a crown on his forehead. But he shook it off, and turning round with a cheerful smile, adjusted his spectacles, and concluded his observations.

"My own verses again :—

'Gone is the spring with wings too light,
The hopeful song of youth is mute,
The sober tints displace the bright,
The blossoms all are turned to fruit.
I, like a tree consumed with blight,
Fit only for the pruner's knife,
Await the day, not far away,
Which asks the harvest of a life.

And, for the past is surely gone,
The coming evil still unseen,
I think of what I might have won,
And fancy things that should have been.
And so in dreams by summer streams,
While golden suns light every sheaf,
I take her hand, and through the land,
My love makes all the journey brief.'"

CHAPTER VII.

MADAME DE GUYON sought her son's house at noon the next day. She was ill with a long night's anxiety, and her face, usually so calm, looked troubled and haggard.

Philip was at home, and would see her.

The moment, long looked for, was come at last, and she trembled so much that she could hardly mount the steps of the door. He was sitting in the dismantled room of the little cottage at Notting-hill, but rose to receive his visitor.

She drew her thick veil more closely over her face, and stood looking at her own son with a thousand emotions in her breast.

Her own son—her Philip! A man now,

whom she had last seen a child of four years old, when she took him out of his cot at Fontainebleau. A tall and shapely man, with a face like that of George Durnford, only darker, and eyes that she knew for her own—large, deep, lustrous. She gazed at him for a few moments without speaking or moving, for her heart was too full.

Philip set a chair for her.

"Madame de Guyon?" he asked, looking at the card. "May I ask what gives me the honour of a visit from—I presume you are the lady whose name—"

"Yes; I am the singer.

"I come," she went on, with an effort, "from your wife."

Philip changed colour.

"Your wife, Philip Durnford, whom you drove away from you three weeks ago. You will be sorry to learn that she is very ill—that she has been dangerously ill."

"Tell me," he stammered—"she is not—not dead?"

"No; grief does not kill."

"Where is she?"

"She is at present under the charge of Miss Venn, the sister of her guardian."

The old jealousy flamed up again in his heart.

"Then she may stay there. She always loved him better than me. I hardly understand, however, what my private affairs have to do with Madame de Guyon."

"I will tell you presently. First, let me plead for this poor girl."

"I am, of course, obliged to listen to all that you have to say."

"I know the whole story, the pitiful, shameful story. I know how, influenced by that bad man, you went through a form of marriage which is illegal; how you gambled away your money; how, when you were ruined at last, you let her go from your doors, with more than the truth—more than the cruel truth—ringing in her ears, disgraced and ashamed."

"More than the truth?"

"Yes, more; for the man was once an ordained minister of his own church, and the illegality consisted only in the place where he married you. Philip Durnford, she *is* your wife."

He answered nothing.

"I do not ask you to take her back. That cannot be yet. I say only, remove the doubt that may exist; and, as soon as she is strong

enough, make her yours in the eye of the law as well as of God."

"Why do *you* come here? What have you to do with me?"

She laid her hand upon his arm.

"Philip Durnford, for the love of all that you hold sacred, promise me to do this. Do not tell me that you—you, of all men in this wide world, purposely deceived the girl, and are not repentant. Oh, Philip—Philip!"

He started. Why should this woman call him by his Christian name? Why should she throw back her veil, and look at him with her full black eyes filled with tears?

"You *had* married her. You meant to marry her. Do not let me believe you to be utterly base and wicked. Do this, if only to undo some of the past. Then let her stay on with her friends—deserted but not disgraced. Think of it, think of it. The girl was innocent and ignorant. She knew nothing of the world—nothing but what one man had taught her. She had no circle of friends, no atmosphere of home to teach her what life means. She fell into your hands. You loved her—I know you loved her—"

"She never loved me,"

"I want to move your heart, Philip Durnford. Think of those in the world who love you, to whom your honour and good name are dear."

She sighed and went on—

"There must be a way to touch your heart. Think of the days you had her with you—men have said that for the sake of those early days, when their wives were to them as angels, they love them for the rest of their lives, long after they have found them women, full of faults, and lower than themselves—when you read that poor child's thoughts, bared before you, and you only—when out of all her thoughts there was not one that she was not ready to confess to you—when you took her out of the solitude of maidenhood, and taught her the sweet mystery of companionship. Philip Durnford, can the Church devise any form of words, any holy ceremony, any oaths or sacraments that ought to be more binding than these things? Can any man have memories of greater tenderness, innocence, and purity than you have of poor Laura? Not a common, untaught girl, of whom you might have been tired in a week; but a girl full of all kinds of knowledge, trained and taught. No one knows the story but Mr. Venn and my-

self, and—and the other man. The fault may be repaired."

"Arthur knows it, Madeleine knows it, all the world knows it by this time. We waste time in words. I loved her—I love her no longer. I am ashamed for my folly, ashamed, if you will, of the evil temper which made me tell her all. If no one knows, why not let things go on as they are? We are both free."

"You are neither of you free; you are bound to each other. Since her departure, you have obtained possession of Arthur Durnford's estate."

"My estate, if you please. I was prepared to prove it mine in a court of law."

"I think not, because I could have prevented it. The estate is not yours by any legal claim."

"Upon my word, Madame de Guyon," said Philip, "you appear to know a great deal about our family history."

"I do know a great deal."

"But I prefer not to discuss the details with you. I return to what I said before. Let things past be forgotten."

He waved his hand impatiently.

"Let us dismiss the subject. And now, Madame de Guyon, pray gratify my curiosity

by telling me how you became mixed up in the affair at all."

"Let me say one word more."

"Not one word. I have, I confess, those qualms of regret which some people attribute to conscience. I am extremely sorry that I have made her unhappy. I do not justify any part of my conduct. Mr. MacIntyre did, it is true, endeavour to persuade me that the marriage was legal. I was madly in love, and tried to believe him. Of course, it was not legal. This is not a thing that can be said and unsaid. It is a fact. Facts are stubborn things, as you know. The history of her life, together with the overpowering affection she has for the other man, are not calculated to make me desirous of turning into an indissoluble contract what was really no contract at all. If she wants money——"

"She would die rather than take money from you."

"In that case, I think there is nothing—really nothing—more to be said."

"Oh, Philip Durnford! is Heaven's wrath—"

"Come, Madame de Guyon—let us not go into theology. We met; I loved her; I deceived her; was partly deceived myself. I did not meet

with any love from her. I lost my money on the turf. I lost my temper with her. We quarrel. She goes away. I sit down and do—nothing. The religious part of the matter concerns me only. Religious matters do not trouble my head much. I am a man of the world, and take things as I find them. Things are mostly bad, and men are all bad. Que voulez vous?"

Good heavens! And this man—this libertine—was her own son, and she was sitting there listening in silence!

But the time was coming to speak.

"I cannot believe you are speaking what you think. You cannot be so bitter against the world."

"Perhaps I have cause."

"You have not, Philip Durnford. I know your whole history—yes, from your childhood. There are few alive—unless it be that man MacIntyre—who know the secret of your birth."

"There, at least, I have no reason to be ashamed. My mother was married to my father."

She bent her face forward, and was silent for a moment.

"Suppose she was not?"

"But she was. I have legal proofs. They are in my desk."

He grew impatient.

"What is this? What does it mean? You come to me, knowing all about me; you interfere in my most private relations. Tell me, I ask again, what it means?"

"I will tell you," she said. "It is a bitter thing to tell—it is a bitter time to have to tell it. I have prayed and hoped for five and twenty years, and now I find you—ah, me!—so changed from the Philip of my dreams."

His face grew white and his hand shook, for a strange foreboding seized him. But he said nothing.

"There was once," she went on, the tears falling fast through her veil—"there was once a rich man and a poor handmaiden. He was kind and generous, and she loved him. They had a son. The time came when the wickedness and folly were to cease. He married, and sent her away—not cruelly, not with harsh words, as you sent Laura away, but kindly and considerately. She knew it must come. She was one of the inferior race, with the old slave blood in her veins. The English gentleman could never marry her, and she knew it all along. She could hope for nothing but his kindness for a time, and look for nothing but a separation. She was

ignorant and untaught. She felt no degradation. That was to come afterwards—to last through all her life. Her lover practised no deception, made her no false promises."

"Go on," he said, hoarsely, when she stopped.

"He married. The mulatto girl went away. With his money she learned to sing. She is living now, rich and of good name. No one knows her past. Philip Durnford, she never married your father, and you are her son."

She raised her veil, and looked him straight in the face. He gazed at her, white and scared.

"And you?"

She fell at his feet, crying—

"Oh, Philip—Philip! I am your guilty mother. Forgive me—forgive me!"

And she waited for his words of love and forgiveness.

Alas! none came. After a while he raised her, and placed her in a chair.

His lips moved, but he could not speak. When he did his voice was hard and harsh.

"You say that you are my mother. I must believe you. That I am still illegitimate? That, too, I must believe. The letters and church register—"

"They are forgeries."

"They are forgeries — I believe that, too. Arthur and I have been tricked and cheated. And so, what next?"

She did not answer.

"See, now, I am an unnatural son, perhaps; but I am going to take a common sense view of the matter. Let everything be as it was before. For all these years I have had no mother, I cannot now—not yet, at least—feel to you as I should. Go to Arthur—I, too, will write to him—tell him what you please. If I were you, I should tell him nothing. And let us part. I am ruined in fortune and unhappy in every relation of life. But we should neither of us be happier if I were to go home with you, and fall into false raptures of filial love. I am unkind, perhaps; but I am trying not to deceive you in any respect. My mother, we have met once. We are not acting a play, and I cannot fall into your arms and love you all at once. I am what my life has made me. I belong to another world—different to yours. I have my habits, my prejudices, my opinions—all bad, no doubt, but I have them. Let me go on my road. Believe me, with such a son you would be miserable. Let us go on keeping our secret from the world. No one shall know that

Madame de Guyon has a son at all, far less such a son as myself."

For all answer she threw her arms round his neck, and kissed him again and again. The tears came into his eyes, and for a moment his heart softened, and he kissed her cheek. Then the frost of selfishness fell upon him again, and he grew hard and cruel.

"Let us part," he said.

"Philip," she moaned, "God punishes me very hard. But it cannot be that you should suffer for my faults. God only grant that you never feel the agony and suffering that you have caused two women who love you."

"The agony and suffering," he answered, lightly, "may be put at the door of our modern civilization. I am sure you will both feel, after a while, that I have acted for the best. Let us part and be friends. Sometimes, I will come and see you."

"I am your mother still. You can say and do nothing that I would not forgive. When your heart is softened, you will come back to me. Stay"—she bent forward with fixed eyes, as of one who looks into the future—"I feel it. The time is not far off when you will lie in my arms, and cry for shame and sorrow. I

cannot make it all out. It is my dream that comes again and again. I see the place—it looks like George's room. And now—now, all is dark." She closed her eyes, and then looked up with her former expression. "And now, farewell—Laura is my daughter."

He held out his hand. She drew her face to him, and kissed him on the brow. Then she let down her veil, and went away.

Hour after hour passed, but Philip still sat in the desolate room whence he had driven away the angels of his life.

CHAPTER VIII.

A MONTH passed by, and no message or letter was sent to Philip. He, now quite gone back to the old life, spent his days chiefly at the Burleigh Club, in the customary unprofitable pursuits of a man about town. This is not an improving course; and

every day found him more ready to keep what he had got, whatever might be the truth. His mother? And if she were his mother, what duty did he owe to her? When the new year came round, he was curious to learn if the usual two hundred pounds would be paid into his account. It was not. Then he was quite certain about the sender. It was Madame de Guyon. Another thing bothered him. Nothing could be ascertained as to Mr. MacIntyre's whereabouts. No notice given at the lodgings. He had quietly disappeared. One thing was ascertainable, however: he had drawn out the whole of his money in bank-notes and gold.

"Come with me," said Venn, after telling Arthur what he had learned—"come with me, and see Madame de Guyon. She would like it."

Arthur went. Madame de Guyon received him with a curious air of interest.

"You are like your father," she said; "but more like poor Adrienne, your mother. May I call you Arthur? You know the whole sad story, Arthur. At this length of time, thinking what I was, in what school brought up, how utterly ignorant, I have brought myself to look upon the past as few women with such

a memory could. I can now, as you see, even talk about it. Have you seen Philip lately?"

"I never see Philip at all."

"I am sorry. Mr. Venn has told me all the story. I am permitted to see my son's wife. I even hope that she may come to live with me. But this estate must be given back. It is not Philip's. Cruel as the blow would be, I would even consent to go into a court and relate my own history, if necessary, rather than let this wrong be done you."

"Philip has offered to restore the estate," said Arthur; "but he may keep it. Be at ease, madame; there will be no steps taken, and Philip may enjoy what the forgeries of MacIntyre have given him."

"I am glad. Put yourself only in my place, Arthur. After twenty-five years of effort, I am rich, I am looked up to, I have a good name."

"Indeed you have," said Arthur.

"What if all were to be lost at a blow?"

"It shall not, madame—it shall not be lost at all. Keep what you have, the reputation that is your own. Rest assured that none of us will ever harm it."

What Marie said about her reputation was less than the truth. Of all great singers none

had become so widely known for her thousand acts of charity and grace; none had a better name; none lived a life more open and observed of all. But she was not satisfied with this. She wanted to have, if she could, the friendship of Madeleine and the love of Laura.

She wrote to Madeleine:—

"You know all my life—its beginning and its progress. You, a girl of Palmiste, can understand what I was thirty years ago, when I was sixteen years old. I was born a slave, white as I was in complexion. My mother was a slave, and therefore I was one. My people were forbidden to marry by law—God's laws set aside for man's purposes. They could not hold property; they were not allowed to wear shoes; they were publicly flogged in the Place; they were not allowed to read and write. When I was eight years old, the emancipation came. But though we were free, the old habits of slave life rested with us. Think of these, if you can, for you are too young to know much about what we were. Think of what you do know, and then ask what punishment I deserve for two years of sin. Believe me, every year that has elapsed since has been a year of punishment,

never so heavy as now, when my son has cast me off. You know what a position I have conquered for myself; you know, too—I write it with a pride that you will appreciate—that no breath of calumny or ill report has been cast upon me during all this time. No one knows who I am, what I was. I wish that no one should know. Why do I write to you? It is because you have been kind to my daughter, my little Laura, and because you are engaged to Arthur Durnford. Years ago—the last time I saw his father—I took the two children, my Philip and Arthur, out of their beds, one after the other. Philip turned from me and cried; Arthur laid his arms round my neck and went to sleep. It was an omen. Part of it has been fulfilled. *Let the rest be fulfilled.* I ask for Arthur's friendship. I—yes, *I*—ask *you* for your friendship. It is because I hear you are unlike other girls—independent, able to think for yourself—that I dare to ask it. And I ask it for the sake of Laura, as well as myself. I want to take her to my own heart. I am a lonely woman, and hunger for somebody to love me. I cannot do this unless her friends—you, and Arthur, and all—will come to my house. Tell me you can, after these years of repentance, give

me your hand. Cannot a woman ever be forgiven by other women?"

Madeleine read the letter with burning cheeks. Why should she not go to see this poor woman, shut out from the world by a thirty years old sin that was itself but ignorance?

But she must keep her secret.

She gave the letter to Arthur to read.

"What will you do, Madeleine?"

"I will do what you wish, Arthur."

"What would you like to do? Is it to go and see her? My dear, if you only knew, she is the best of good women."

So Madeleine went.

All this time Lollie was slowly recovering her strength, under the motherly care of Sukey.

When she grew strong enough to go out, Hartley thought Philip's promise should be fulfilled. He approached the subject very delicately one day.

"I have been thinking, Lollie," he said, "that in case of any legal difficulties about your marriage—"

"What legal difficulties, Mr. Venn?"

"You see, my child, a ceremony perfectly binding in all other respects may very possibly

not be in accordance with the law as regards succession to property, and so forth."

"But what have I to do with succession to property?"

"A good deal, Lollie. And I, as your guardian, must protect your interests. The best way will be for us to have the marriage done over again."

"Over again! But then Philip would have to be there."

"Philip will be there. He has expressed his readiness to be there. You need not be alarmed, Lollie," for she began to shiver from head to foot. "He will just come for the ceremony, and go away immediately afterwards. You will not perhaps even speak to him, nor he to you. All that is arranged. I know, Lollie, child, how painful all this is to you; but it must be done. Believe me, it is for your own sake."

She acquiesced. If Hartley Venn had told her to go straight to the guillotine, she would have done it for his sake.

The necessary arrangements were made. An old college friend of Venn's undertook to marry them, being just told that the circumstances were peculiar, and that he was to ask no questions.

And then Madeleine wrote to Philip :—

"MY DEAR PHILIP—You will be prepared to go through the marriage ceremony of the Church of England the day after to-morrow, at eleven o'clock, at —— Church, —— Square. It has been explained to Laura, to save her self-respect, that this will be done in the view of possible legal difficulties. She is growing stronger and better, and will, as soon as she is able to be moved, go to reside with Madame de Guyon. For everybody's sake—for hers as well as ours—old histories will be left alone, and no steps will be taken to convict the forger who deceived us all. Keep the estate of Fontainebleau, dear Philip, and be happy. You have promised to do everything I asked you for Laura. You will first marry her legally; you will then take her into the vestry alone, and ask her forgiveness. You cannot refuse so much. I hope that as the years move on, you may love each other again, and forget the wrongs and woes of the past. I love your wife more every day I see her.

"There is one other point I should like to ask you, if I may. It is of Madame de Guyon. You know what I would ask you, and I will not name it. Oh, Philip, if it is a good thing, as

people write, for man to be rich in woman's love, how rich ought you to be! Think of all this, and do what your heart prompts you.

"You will see me at the church.—Your affectionate sister,

"MADELEINE."

But the letter reached Philip at a wrong moment, when he was in one of his bitter moods, and he only tore it up and swore. Nevertheless, he wrote to say he would keep his promise.

It was a bitterly cold morning in January, with snow upon the ground, and icicles hanging from every projection. Sukey was to know nothing of the business on hand, and was mightily astonished when Madeleine called at ten o'clock, and took out Laura in her carriage, wrapped up as warmly as could be managed. Hartley Venn and Madame de Guyon joined them at the corner of the street, and the conspirators drove to the church.

It was the most difficult thing of any that Laura had yet been called upon to do. She had made up her mind never to see her husband again. Now it had all to be gone over just as before. She remembered that last scene, when, after words sharper than any steel, Philip fell

crying at her feet as she left the room, praying her to come back and let all be as it was. But this could never be. She knew it could never be. All the little ties that grow up between lovers—the tendrils that bind soul to soul, growing out of daily thought and daily caresses—were snapped and severed at a stroke. The ideal had been destroyed at one blow; even its ruins seemed vanished and lost. Philip had more of her pity now than of her love. No more her gallant and noble lover, the crown and type of all loyalty and honour, but degraded and fallen, his spurs struck off, his scutcheon smirched—a recreant knight. She had forgiven him. Perhaps, too, love might have been born out of forgiveness: a rose-bush beaten to the ground will put up one or two branches, and blossom again. And woman's love, like God's, continues through sin, and shame, and disgrace. And then, another thing. She had lived a different life. The three women who were now her companions and friends—Madeleine, Marie, and Sukey—each in her own way, had taught her what Hartley Venn could never do: how women look on things; how great had been her own sin in keeping her secret from Hartley. With all these influences upon her, as she grew

stronger, her very face seemed to change; she passed from a girl to a woman, and her beauty grew, so to speak, stronger and more real.

Hartley led her up the aisle. There were no bridal veils, no bridesmaids, no pealing organ: She kept her eyes on the ground; but she knew Philip was standing, pale and agitated, by the altar.

The clergyman came out.

A strange wedding. The clerk and the pew-opener stared with open eyes at each other; for the bride stood before the altar, like a culprit—pale, thin, tearful, shivering. Beside her Venn, his smooth cheek flushed with suppressed fury, as he stood face to face with the destroyer of his happiness. All his philosophy, his acceptance of the inevitable, his resignation to fate, seemed useless now to stay the angry beating of his heart. But for the presence of the women he might have broken out then and there. Behind Laura, another, more deeply moved than any of the rest—the mother of the bridegroom. With her, Madeleine, anxious that there should be, above all, no scene—the only one present to whom the whole ceremony did not appear a kind of strange, wild dream.

As for Philip, he stood, at first defiantly,

looking straight at the clergyman; and but for the hot flush upon his face you might have thought him careless. Madeleine looked at him, and knew otherwise. Presently he had to kneel. Then, open as natures such as his are to every kind of influence, the words of the prayer fell upon his dry heart like rain upon a thirsty soil, and he was touched, almost to tears, by pity and sorrow for the gentle girl at his side. But not by love.

They stood up, face to face. For the second time their hands were joined with solemn words; and Laura started when she heard the voice of Philip—low and sad, as it seemed—saying, after the clergyman, the words prescribed by the Church.

They were pronounced man and wife.

Philip took her by the hand, and led her into the vestry, shutting the door.

He placed a chair for her, and stood in front. The church service had softened him, and the better nature was again uppermost.

"Laura," he said, "I promised Madeleine to remove any doubts that might exist in any mind by going through this ceremony. That is done. We are now married so that no one, if they could say anything before, can say a word

now against the legality of our union. But one thing remains. I have done you cruel wrong. Will you forgive me?"

"Yes, Philip, I have forgiven."

"Freely and fully?"

"Long since, Philip—long since."

"We ought never to have met, child. Tell me again, that I may take the words away with me, that you forgive me."

"Philip, in the sight of God, I forgive all and everything."

"We must part, Laura, now—at all events, for the present. It is best so, is it not? I shall travel. We will not even write to each other. I have not forgiven myself. Kiss me once, my wife."

She stood up and kissed him on the lips, her tears raining on his cheeks. Then Philip opened the door and stepped into the church, where the clerk was standing open-mouthed at this extraordinary conduct.

"There are some papers to sign, I believe," he said.

They all went into the vestry. Philip signed.

"I have done what I promised, Madeleine."

Madeleine made a gesture in the direction of

Madame de Guyon, who was bending over Laura.

"You have no word for her," she whispered.

He turned to his mother, hesitated a moment, then raised her hand and kissed it. She threw her arms about his neck and kissed him passonately, whispering—

"Philip, my son, come back to us soon."

He freed himself gently, placed her in a chair, and took his hat. Then he saw Hartley.

"You are Mr. Venn?" he asked. "I cannot ask your forgiveness—that would be too preposterous. I leave my wife and — and my mother in your care."

He left the vestry, and strode down the aisle. They heard his footsteps out of the church door, and down the street outside. Then they, too, left the church, and drove away in Madeleine's carriage to Madame de Guyon's house.

"He asked me to forgive him, maman," said Laura, sobbing in her arms. "He told me he was sorry. Let us pray for him together."

"This," said the clerk to the old woman who assisted—"this here is the most extraordinary and rummest wedding I ever see. First, the young man he comes half an hour early. I told

him to look at the clock. 'Damn the clock,' he said, begging your pardon, Mrs. Trigg. Such was his blasphemious words, and in a church! He didn't give you much, I suppose, Mrs. Trigg? You aint a great deal richer for this precious morning's work?"

"Not a brass farthing!"

"Ah! they *call* themselves gentlefolks, I suppose. It's a queer way to begin married life by giving the church people nothing, let alone quarrelling before ever they come near the place! However, I dessay there's nothing absolutely illegal in not giving the clerk and the pew-opener their just and lawful dues. But it looks bad. It looks very bad. Mark my words, Mrs. Trigg. There will be no blessin' on this wedding.

CHAPTER IX.

SO Philip went his way, and they heard no more of him for a time. But a change was coming over the unhappy young man. A change for the worse. He was, as has been seen, of that light and unstable character whose good and evil never seem to end their contest, whose owner is able at one moment to resolve the highest and noblest things, and at the next to fall into the lowest and basest actions. Does this come from the fatal African blood? God forbid that we should say so. But surely it may be helped for the worse by the presence of a constant suspicion of inferiority. It is self-respect that makes men walk erect, and in a straight line. We who sin are men who esteem ourselves but lightly.

Sinners there are who think no small beer of themselves — rather the finest and oldest Trinity Audit; but they are those who have framed themselves a special code of honour and morality. And, if we called things by their right names, we should not use the idle metaphors of the common jargon, saying of a man that he wants ballast, bottom, backbone, staying power, energy, but we should say that he wants self-respect. This is the quality that makes a man Senior Wrangler, Victoria Cross, K.C.B., Mayor of his town, Deputy Grand of the Ancient Order of Druids, or any other distinction we long for. This is what inspires industry, pluck, perseverance, confidence — everything. Dear friends, and fathers of families, make your sons conceited, vain, proud, self-believers, encourage confidence. Never let them be snubbed or bullied. See that they walk head erect and fist ready. Inspire them with such a measure of self-esteem as will make them ready to undertake anything. If they fail, as is quite likely, no matter. They would have failed in any case, you see; and they have always their conceit to fall back upon. Lord John Russell is a case in point. Ready to command the Channel Fleet—you know the rest of it. I know a man—the

stupidest, piggest-headed, most ignorant, most conceited, and most inflated bloater of a man you ever saw. This creature, by sheer dint of conceit and vanity, which made him step calmly to the front, and stand there *just as if he were in his right place*, has a great house at South Kensington, and is director of a lot of companies. He is also, save the mark, a Fellow of the Royal Society. He got this, I know, by asking for it; and they were so astonished by the request that they gave him the distinction by mistake. He sent in his name with all the letters of the alphabet after it—those degrees which you can get for two guineas a year or thereabouts—F.A.S., F.B.S., F.C.S., F.D.S., &c.; and then F.R.A.S., F.R.B.S., F.R.C.S., &c.; and after the names there came the words, in great capitals, AUTHOR OF THE WORK ENTITLED "ON THE TRITURATION OF IGNEOUS PARTICLES." You see, he once rubbed a couple of sticks together to try and make a fire, after the manner of the barbarians, and failed to do more than bark his own knuckles. Then he wrote a pamphlet, in six pages, on the subject. This was his Work, to which he refers whenever a scientific point is mooted.

Pardon me, reader—whenever I think of that

man and this subject, I am carried away with an irrepressible enthusiasm and admiration.

Graviora canamus. It is an easy thing to write of a man's downward course—but a sad thing. Poor Philip, seeing sometimes the things he had done in their true and real characters, was afflicted with a sense of shame and disgrace that became so strong as to drive him back upon himself. He left off going to the club. That is to say, he left off going among his fellow-men at all. He had no friends, except club friends. Occasionally he might be met, but not in the daytime, wandering carelessly along the streets. For he could not sleep at night, and used to tire himself by long, lonely walks, and then get home to his rooms at three in the morning, and go to bed exhausted. Presently, two devils entered into him and possessed him. The first was the demon of drink. He began to drink in the morning; he went on drinking all day. At night he was sodden, and could sleep.

All this was not done in a day. A man who begins to live by himself in this great London, where it is so easy, soon drops into the habit of ceasing to care for any society. The streets are society — the long and multitudinous streets,

with the roar of the carriages and the faces of the people. The streets inspired Dickens, who would come up from the country to London, and find in the streets the refreshment that he needed. The streets possessed the soul of De Quincy. To me there is no exhibition in the world comparable to Regent-street at four, or to the Strand all day long. I know a man who dropped some years since into this lonely life. He goes nowhere now; he cares to go nowhere. He dines every day at the selfsame seat and the selfsame place, on the selfsame dinner. Then he goes back to his chambers, smokes a cigar, and presently to bed. In the daytime he goes up and down the streets.

Philip, in his bitter moods, began by going less often to the club, so that he gradually dropped out of the set. He was no longer to be depended on for a rubber. His face was missed at the nightly pool. No more bets were to be got out of him. And then he ceased to go there at all.

It was at this period, during February and March, that another fancy took him. He found out from the Directory where Madame de Guyon lived. It was in one of those houses that lie so thickly round the north of Regent's

Park. One night he walked up there after dinner. It was a house with a little garden-ground under the windows. One room, the drawing-room, was lighted up. The blinds were not down, and the curtains not drawn. Philip stood on the pavement, and looked in through the railings. The party inside consisted of two ladies—his mother and his wife—and a man, Hartley Venn. Venn was lying lazily in an easy-chair; Madame Guyon was sitting opposite to him, knitting; Lollie sat in the middle, reading aloud. Philip heard her voice. She had one of those sweet, rich voices—not strong—which curl round a man's heart like the tendrils of a vine. I hate a woman with a loud voice, and I hate a woman who whispers. He could not hear what she read, but he listened to the voice, and tried to remember the past. All that blind, mad passion was dead. There was left in his heart the *power*, like a seed waiting for the spring, of waking to a higher and purer love. And now he seemed to know her better, and acknowledged within himself that she was every way worthy of the best love a man can bring.

He stood without, in the rain and cold, looking on the quiet happiness within. Presently, Madame de Guyon went to the piano, and began

to sing. Her glorious voice filled the little room to overflowing, and welled forth in great waves of sound. Philip clutched the railings, and pressed his cheek against the iron. This was his mother: this glorious queen among women, this empress of song. There was the peaceful retreat waiting for him. He knew he had but to knock at the door. It was like Bunyan's way to Heaven: to knock at the door was enough.

Then the younger lady took the elder's place and began to play—some of the old things he knew, that she had so often played to him. She played on, with her head thrown back, in that attitude of careless grace which he had never seen in any other woman, with lips half parted, eyes half closed, while the music rose and fell beneath her fingers, and flowed, like the rising tide among the caves, within her soul. Then she, too, stopped; and Venn got up and shook hands with both. He passed out, and crossed to the other side of the street; but did not notice the man leaning against the railings, with straining eyes, staring within.

Then the blind was drawn down. A bell rang. Some one—his wife—played an evening hymn. They sang. Then a monotonous voice for a few minutes, and presently the lights were

extinguished. They had prayed, and were gone to bed. But they had prayed for him. And as he stood there, after the lights were extinguished, there were two women, in two rooms, each on her knees by the bedside, praying for him again—his mother and his wife. Then he came to himself, and walked back as fast as he could, trying to pull himself together.

Two or three nights afterwards, he went up again. This time there were no lights. All was dark. He waited till past eleven, walking backwards and forwards in the road. Then a carriage drew up, and he saw them descend and enter the house. They had been to the theatre, and were laughing and talking gaily. That night he went home in a rage. What right had they to be happy without him?

But he went up again. Sometimes the blinds were left up, and he saw the group. Oftener, blinds and curtains were drawn, and he could only hear the voices, and the sound of the piano. He knew well enough which of the two was playing; and also got to know—which filled his soul with inexpressible pangs of rage and jealousy—that Venn was there about four nights in the week.

All this time he was drinking hard, and living

entirely alone. One night he went to bed earlier than usual—about one o'clock—and, contrary to his usual practice, went to sleep at once. At three o'clock he awoke with a shudder and a start. Opening his eyes wide, he saw, sitting by the side of the bed—in fact, on his own pile of clothes—a skeleton. Not a skeleton of the comic order, with a pipe in his mouth, such as we are fond of drawing, but of the entirely tragic and melancholy kind: with his mouth open wide, from ear to ear, as if it was a throat cut an inch and a half too high up; a long, bony hand that pointed straight at him, and shook its finger in anger; eyes that glared with a horrid earnestness; bones, all the way down, that seemed transparent. Solitude makes men nervous: drink makes them see skeletons. Philip sat up and glared. Then he gave a half cry, and buried his head under the clothes.

Presently he looked out again. The skeleton was gone. He turned round with a sigh of relief. The skeleton was *on the other side.* Then he covered his head again and waited till daybreak —till past six o'clock. By that time the spectre was gone.

The next night he did not dare to go to bed again. And then it was that the second devil,

of whom I have spoken above, took possession of him. This time it was the demon of play. Philip, who knew everything about London, was not ignorant of the existence of one or two places—where, indeed, he had more than once been seen—where you may find a green table, dice, and other accessories to the gambling table. To one of these he went that night at one o'clock. There were two or three of his club acquaintances there, who greeted him as one newly returned from some long foreign travel.

He got through the night so. And saw no spectre when he awoke at midday.

Then he began to frequent the place regularly. It seemed to him the only place where pleasure could be found. At the age of six and twenty this young man found the fruits of the world turned in his mouth to dust and ashes. He had no longer any ambition or any hope. The long night spent over the chances of the game gave him light, companionship, excitement. To keep his head clear, he gave up the brandy and water of the day. So far this was a gain. But then he took to champagne at night, and drank too much of it. As for the play, whether he lost or won made no difference, because he never lost heavily;

and fortune favoured him by giving him neither great coups, nor great reverses.

This kind of thing went on for a couple of months or so. He grew thin, pale, excitable. He had not the moral courage even to go among men at all, never went anywhere except to the gaming table—except when he walked up to Regent's Park to catch a glimpse of the home he had abandoned. The sight of it, the occasional sight of its inhabitants, was like a lash of scorpions. If he saw them happy, his blood boiled with jealousy and rage. If he thought they looked depressed, he ground his teeth together, and cursed himself for the cause.

At first he used to have mighty yearnings of spirit, and was moved to knock at the door and ask admittance. These emotions being suppressed, day after day, grew gradually of less strength. Then he ceased to think of any change at all; and went on moodily—without any of that singing and dancing of which he spoke to Madeleine—down the slope of Avernus, the bottom of which was not far off.

He had laid his skeleton by the process of changing his hours altogether. But it was only laid for a time. Youth will stand a good deal;

but there is a point beyond which you may not go. Then a disordered liver, an unhealthy brain, a nervous excitement, produce discomforts of a very rude and practical kind. There came a time, early in April, when his sleep was so tormented with terrible dreams, and his waking hours with terrible thoughts—thoughts that he knew could belong to no sound brain, and sights that he knew to be unreal or supernatural—that he went to a doctor, and humbly asked assistance.

"What have you been doing?"

"Nothing. Smoking, drinking, living alone, gambling. Everything that is bad."

"Leave it all off. Go into society."

"The only society I can go into is the society of men who do these things."

"You have money? Good. Then go away. That is the only thing I can do for you. Live temperately, and go away."

"Where am I to go to?"

"Go? Go anywhere. As far as you can. Take a long sea voyage. Come back after it—say in two years' time, and we will see how you are. If you stay here and go on drinking, you will probably be dead in six months."

"What does it matter if I am?"

"Pardon me, my dear sir. My business is to prolong life, not to examine into the desirability of preserving it. Most of my patients prefer to live. Doubtless, they consider the chances of a change dubious."

Philip went away relieved. He would go away and travel. The new thought occupied his mind all day; and for that night he slept soundly, and if skeletons danced in his room, as they did sometimes, he was asleep and did not see them.

Where to go?

He awoke in the morning asking himself the question. And then a happy thought struck him. He would go away for good and all; he would get out of a country where all the memories were miserable to him. The past should be shaken off like an old garment. He would begin a new life; he would go and live on his own estate—Arthur's, by right, said his conscience—in Palmiste.

His thoughts flew to the old place. He felt again the warm breath of the summer air; he sat in the shade, deep down in the ravine, where the cool dash and plash of the mountain stream made sweet music in his ears;

roamed the forest, gun in hand, while the branches sighed in the breeze. He saw the hill tops purpling at dawn, and the heavy dew lying in great beads upon the roses. He heard the shrill voices of the coolies, and watched the Indian women pass by, with their lithe, graceful figures and their scarlet robes. And all at once a wild longing came over him to be there, and at peace.

All day long he went about, radiant with the new thought. He drove to Silver's, and ordered a lot of things to be put together at once. He drove to his agent's, and told him what he was going to do. He ascertained that the steamer left Southampton in three days, and he took his passage.

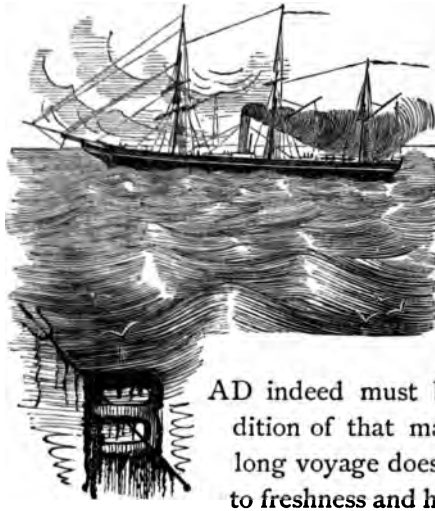
Then he went home and dreamed of the future.

There, in that land where it is always afternoon, peace would come to him at last, and conscience be still. A pleasant life lay before him—a life of ease and dignity. He would be a judge among the people of his estate, as his father had been before him: he would be the giver and dispenser of hospitality. He would leave behind him, and forget for ever, the two women who could be happy while he was

wretched; Arthur, the wronged — all against whom he had sinned. He would forget them all, and be happy.

Alas! "Cœlum, non animum, mutant qui trans mare currunt."

CHAPTER X.



SAD indeed must be the condition of that man whom a long voyage does not restore to freshness and health. Here are no letters, no duns, no newspapers. The world goes on without you. One has no longer

the fidgety feeling, like the fly on the wheel, of being essential to the march of events. Nor is there any sense of responsibility. Nothing to be done; nothing to be thought of: eating and drinking the business of the day, its pleasure to watch the waves and the skies.

For Philip there was the additional pleasure of renewing intercourse with his brother man. He lost all his spectres, grew once more bright-eyed and keen-witted, and, when they steamed into the harbour of St. Denys, had altogether forgotten the wretched being who clung to the railings of the little house at Regent's Park, and peered into the brightness within. He stepped upon the quay—the old familiar place—and looked round him. There were the coolies at work; the white houses of the residents stretching up the broad street; beyond, the ugly spire of the cathedral, like a gigantic extinguisher: and over all towered the mountains, blackening now with the shadows of evening. And then there fell upon him a very curious feeling, because he suddenly remembered that he should not know a single soul in the whole island: not one. During the whole voyage he had been nursed by a vague idea that he was rushing back into the arms of innumerable friends. Now

he felt like Oliver Goldsmith when he went among the Hollanders with the grandest projects, and only remembered too late that he knew no Dutch. But his laughter was short, and he felt somewhat saddened as he ordered his things to be taken to the hotel.

There is a hotel at St. Denys—in fact, there are many, but only one of decent repute. It consists of a long, low wooden house, painted a bright yellow, with a deep verandah round it. It has two storeys, the upper one containing the bed-rooms; and for coolness' sake the partitions are not run up to the ceiling, leaving a clear space above. This not only allows the air to circulate, but also permits the guests the advantage of overhearing all the conversation that may be going on in the adjoining rooms. Lying and sitting about the verandah are a crowd of Indian boys, dressed in a suit of uniform of white trousers and black jackets, neat and handy looking. Outside, under the thick shade of the trees, sit the happy islanders, playing dominoes. They begin this amusement at early dawn, and go on, with short intervals for business and longer ones for breakfast and dinner, till it is time to go to bed—that is, till about eight o'clock. They do this every day, including Sunday, and

are never tired; and when Azrael is sent to fetch them away, they are thinking—as they have been thinking all their lives—of the last combination of the pips. At least their lives may be called happy, because they have all that they desire.

All was as Philip remembered it years before. The waiters ran about and chattered; the players smoked cigars, drank orgeat, and chattered; and, that nothing might be wanting, a great black parrot, which had been there ten years before, was there still, stalking about with an air of being the only really superior person present. It was a parrot of infinite accomplishments; and at sight of him Philip laughed, thinking how he had made Arthur and himself laugh years before. For he had been carefully instructed in, and had by sheer force of imitative genius acquired, the art of representing all the sounds which proceed from a person affected with cold, from its earliest appearance to its most advanced stage of pulmonary consumption. Too much of him might be undesirable, but at first he was amusing. Nothing was changed. At the table d'hôte, the same dinner. The principal guests were his fellow-travellers in the mail—at all events, the most important,

because they had the latest news. Of course their importance lasts only five minutes; for no one can be expected in Palmiste to pay attention to foreign news for a longer time. The concession of five minutes granted to the outer world, the conversation rolled on in its usual groove, and the latest scandal resumed its proper place. Philip noticed it all, and listened, wondering how he should get on with all these people, whom he seemed to remember in a kind of dream. It was their old manner of talk, he remembered.

He went to bed early. Just as he was turning in, he heard voices from the next room.

"Dites moi, mon ami"—it was a lady's voice —"who is this M. Durnford, who has just arrived, and dined at the table d'hôte?"

"It is not the son of our old friend," replied her husband—"not, that is, the son of your schoolfellow, Adrienne de Rosnay. Another son altogether. Some early liaison. His name is Philip. He has bought the estate of his half-brother, and comes here to see it, I suppose. It is not probable he will live here."

"No; that is, of course, out of the question. He is a handsome young man. Pity he is a

mulatto. He had much better go back to England or France, where they are not particular as to colour."

There was a plunge and a heavy thud, as if some stout person was getting into bed, and in five minutes dead silence, but for a gentle breathing, which gradually deepened into a melodious snore.

But Philip was lying in bed, tossing about and clenching his fists. On the very first night to be reminded in this brusque and brutal way—it was too much. He lay awake. Why had he come here? What cursed fate was it which brought him back to the island he had always hated?

The night was hot, too; and the mosquitoes were stinging his face and hands. He got out of bed and lit a candle, and sat at the open window, smoking a cigar. The town was silent and asleep. Not even a dog barked. But outside, the moonlight bathed everything with a flood of rich white light. The breeze from the mountains fanned his cheek. There was the solemn silence of the night on the sleeping city. But the peace of night brought no peace to him. Why, why had he come all this way to be reminded of what he had run away from England

to forget? And then he cursed his fate and himself.

All night he sat brooding and wretched. As the day broke, he fell asleep, his head on the window-sill, and slept till the noise of the Indian boys recalled him to wakefulness. Then, to avoid meeting the people of the next bedroom, he ordered a carriage to be brought round, and drove, in the early morning, away to his own estate.

As he had written to no one, he was quite unexpected. The house was uninhabited, the manager and his wife living in a cottage close by. They came and welcomed him—a bright, cheery young Frenchman, with a pretty little wife. While his own house was being set in order, would he use theirs? The manager led him over his mills, pointed out the great improvements that had been made, and then took him back to his wife, who had got a dainty breakfast, with the best claret at her command, ready for him. Then, all day there was cleaning and setting in order; and then, for a few days after, novelty and strangeness, which distracted Philip, and kept him in high spirits. Then he had to go and see his lawyer, which was a day's journey, in and out of town; then to get the

lawyer to come and stay a day or two with him. All this took time, and a fortnight passed away before Philip found it dull, or had a thought for the past.

After that, things began to be a little monotonous. For no one called upon him.

Philip fell back upon the officers. There was a regiment whose head-quarters were stationed at a place some eight miles off. It was on detachment duty, but there were always a good many of the officers to be found about the mess-rooms. He knew the regiment, and called upon his old friends. So, at least, companionship was attained, at the cost of perpetual dinners at Fontainebleau—which mattered little, for Philip liked hospitality. But the ——th was a fast regiment, and the young fellows who went to Fontainebleau were the fastest; and the old "pace" began again, with cards, brandy and soda, and late hours.

The first event of importance, as the histories say, was a special humiliation. The estate adjoining his own belonged to a certain old French gentleman who held strong views on the subject of the mixed races. He had been a friend of Mr. Durnford père, but he abstained from calling upon his son. Now he gave, once a

year, a great hunting party, lasting a week, to which all the island was invited—the Governor, the merchants, the officers, everybody who had the least claim to call himself some one. Philip was his next neighbour. But he did not invite him. Then his guests began to talk about putting up at Fontainebleau during the chasse, and it was awkward to have to say that you were not invited.

The time drew near. Philip was riding with one of his guests in the evening. They passed the house of M. de Geoffroi, who was sitting in his verandah.

"Aha!" cried Philip's companion. "Let us ride in, and call on the old boy. You'll do the talking, you know. I can't speak French."

Philip assented, and in a few moments was introduced to a white-headed old gentleman, who saluted him coldly.

"I had the honour of knowing Captain Durnford well," he said.

"I remember you well, M. de Geoffroi. You were often at Fontainebleau when I was a boy."

"I was. And your brother, M. Durnford? He is married, I hear, to Mdlle. de Villeroy."

"He is engaged, at least."

"Yes. It was once the wish of both parents

that the estates should pass into the same hands."

Philip reddened.

"That, at least, cannot be, because the estate has now passed into my hands."

"So I have been informed."

Then they talked about weather, and so forth; and presently, when they went away, M. de Geoffroi offered his hand to the other, and merely bowed to Philip.

"Must have set the old man's back up, Durnford. What did you say to him?"

But Philip did not answer; being, in fact, in a temper the reverse of amiable.

The hunting party came off, and Philip sat at home with troubled heart. The party was nothing, but the *reason*—the *reason* for his exclusion from it. Then he gave a great party of his own, asking all the Englishmen, who came, and as many Frenchmen as he thought would come. It was purely out of revenge; but it seemed to affect M. de Geoffroi very little.

One more event happened to him; and then he shut himself up altogether at Fontainebleau.

There came the cold season, and the time for balls and dances. Of course, Philip got an invitation to the great ball of the year, at Govern-

ment House, at which the Governor appears in uniform—a gorgeous suit, similar to that of a Lord Lieutenant; while the members of the Legislative Council wear wonderful coats, with gold lace in a sort of cushion just where the tails begin, too high up for use, except in a second class railway carriage, where it might protect the small of the back. Then the heads, and the sub-heads, and even the tails of departments appear in wonderful and strange costumes, the effect of which at first, on the civilian of plain clothes, is simply bewildering, and even appalling. Of course there are also the scarlet coats of the officers. And, on the whole, a Colonial State Ball is as pretty a sight—with the ladies all in their very finest and best—as one can generally see.

Why do we sneer at the universal desire to put on a uniform? I have never worn any, not even as a volunteer private, but I can sympathize with it. I like to see a man in all his bravery. I think there is no more admirable and edifying spectacle than that of the ordinary Briton in some strange and wonderful costume, put on about once a year. He wears it with such a lordly air, as one who should say, "This is nothing to what I could look if I had on what

I deserved." Then his wife admires him, and his daughters. And more than that, all the black-coated civilians who sneer at him envy him. The last is a very great point.

Philip, being an ex-commissioned officer, was above uniforms, it may be presumed. But he was not above admiration for the uniforms of the other sex. The women of Palmiste, pale and colourless perhaps, are yet, above the generality of women, gracieuses. They become their uniforms. They dance with a passion and an abandon which is unknown in colder regions. It is their one great accomplishment; and the young fellow fresh from London rooms looks on with astonishment at the lightning rapidity with which the smoothly polished floors are covered. Very soon he falls in with it, too, if he be of a sympathetic mind.

Philip, long exiled from ladies' society, enjoyed it hugely; danced everything, always with English ladies; devoured a splendid supper; took plenty of champagne. Then, as bad luck would have it, after supper one of his friends introduced him to the lady he had been dancing with, a liberty quite unpardonable by all the rules. Philip asked for the next waltz. The girl turned red, and, after a moment's hesitation,

acceded, and put her arm in his. Her brother, who was standing by with frowning forehead, stepped forward at once.

"Pardon me, monsieur," he said. "My sister does not dance any more this evening."

The young lady took her brother's arm, and walked away.

The next moment he saw her whirled round in the arms of an Englishman.

All the blood rushed to his head, and he staggered with the rage which nearly stifled him. For he *knew the reason.*

He stepped across the room to where the young Frenchman was standing, and touched him on the arm.

"Will you give me a moment's conversation outside?"

The young fellow hesitated for a moment. Then he shrugged his shoulders.

"As you will," he said.

They stepped down the stairs, and into the garden. No one was there but themselves.

"May I ask the reason of your refusal to let your sister dance with me just now?"

The Frenchman hesitated. Philip repeated the question.

"Really, monsieur," said the young fellow, "it

seems absurd to put such a question. Can we not leave it unanswered?"

"No. I demand an answer, and the true one. I am publicly insulted. I insist on an explanation."

"Suppose I have none to give you."

"I *will* have one."

"You shall not have one," returned the other, quietly.

Philip lost command of himself, twisted his hand in the other's collar, and threw him heavily to the ground.

"Will you give me one now?"

"Mulatto, I will give you none," hissed out his enemy, lying on the ground.

Philip left him there. Going back to the ball-room, he found young Freshley, of the ——th.

"Come with me for a moment," he whispered.

They went outside. In the garden was the young Frenchman, trying to repair the damage done to his necktie and collar.

"There has been a row," said Philip. "You know this man, perhaps? I have knocked him down."

"I know Mr. Freshley," said the Frenchman.

"Be my friend, Freshley. I will wait for you in your quarters."

Philip went away to barracks, leaving the two together.

"What is it, D'Auray?"

"I called him a mulatto. Eh, bien: it is true, at any rate. Then he put his hand to my collar, and I fell over his foot."

"Doesn't seem manners to tell a man a thing he isn't proud of, does it?"

"What business has he among ladies?"

"I didn't invite him, so I can hardly say. But you had better ask the aide-de-camp. Look here, old fellow, this is a bad business. Don't let us have any public shindy. Give me the name of a man, and I will try to make things square."

"I put myself in the hands of my cousin. You will find him in the ball-room."

Duelling has gone out of fashion in England, but it still lingers in one or two of her Majesty's colonies, where, although they have the institution of a jury, the sympathies of the jury are sure to be with the combatants. Here there would surely be fighting, thought Freshley, beginning to wish he had nothing to do with the business, in case of the thing ending seriously. He found the cousin, and put the case to him.

"I'm going home now to barracks. Find me there early to-morrow morning."

He went home, and discovered Philip walking up and down in a wild state of excitement.

"I will kill him, Freshley. By Heaven, I will kill him."

"You've knocked him down, anyhow. Now go to bed, old fellow—it's past two o'clock. The cousin is coming to-morrow, and we shall have an apology or a challenge. If the latter—why, then, I suppose, we must fight."

"Fight? Of course I will fight. I tell you, I mean to kill him."

"Deuced easy to pack a jury if he kills you, Philip. Don't quite see my way to packing one if you kill him."

"Bah! You don't know the country. Any lawyer will do it for you."

They went to bed, but not to sleep; and at five o'clock Freshley saw Philip outside, walking up and down, clenching his fists, in the moonlight. So, with a sigh, he got up too, and, half dressing, went out and joined him. Day broke at six, and then they had coffee and a cigar.

At half-past six the cousin was seen coming to the barracks.

"It's manners for me to receive him alone, I suppose," said Freshley. "Let's look as if we had done it fifty times before. Hang it, I feel

like an Irishman out of one of Lever's novels. You go in, Phil. Well, M. D'Auray, and when do we fight?"

"I think, Mr. Freshley, that—well, you see, it's an awkward business. I hardly see my way to a fight."

"Oh, very well. For my own part, I'm very glad. My man is insulted. That you will acknowledge. Your man is knocked down. That there is no getting over, is there? So you won't fight! I'm sure I'm not displeased; because, after all, yours is the most injured side, I should say. Matter of taste—never been knocked down myself. Why can't we fight?"

"Well, your principal—I am not in the least wishing to insult or offend you."

"You forget that Mr. Durnford has had the honour of bearing her Majesty's commission."

"Not at all. That was considered. I laid the case before several of my friends. We all agreed that if he were still an officer in the British army, to refuse a duel would be to insult the English flag. But he is no longer an officer, and we cannot fight him."

Freshley whistled.

"Oh, very good, I'm sure. The knocking down is on your side, as I remarked before.

Have a pick-me-up this fine morning, M. D'Auray—a brandy and soda?"

"Nothing, thank you. I have the honour to wish you a good morning."

"Good morning, M. D'Auray. Perhaps your cousin would like a pick-me-up."

But M. D'Auray did not appreciate the joke, being unacquainted with the niceties of the English language.

"Now, that's devilish smart and good," said the lieutenant, left alone. "Phil, my boy, come out. They won't fight."

"Why not?"

"Don't know. Can't say. Wasn't told. Funk, I expect. I say, Phil, I asked him if his cousin wanted a pick-me-up this morning. Devilish good remark, eh? I don't know when I said anything sharper. He'll find out what I meant by and by. Look it up in the dictionary, I suspect. Well, old boy, I'm glad we're out of it. I didn't like it at the first. And, between ourselves, I couldn't afford to lose my commission just now. Pretty fools we should look, the brace of us, in a dock, with the beak pounding away at us, saying it was the worst case he had ever known in the whole course of his professional career—eh? And then, perhaps, chokee

for six months, and a court-martial afterwards. Upon my word, I'm delighted. And now I think I shall have another nap."

But that was Philip's last appearance in public. Henceforth his days are few and troubled, and they are spent wholly on his own estate at Fontainebleau.

CHAPTER XI.

MEANWHILE, in the quiet house at Regent's Park, the two women waited —some women seem to have nothing to do except to wait. No change came to them. All they knew—and this through Arthur's lawyer—was that Philip had arrived in Palmiste, and was residing on the estate. Nothing more. As for Laura, her suffering was over.

Only she was subdued. Time, and the atmosphere of love with which they surrounded her, had cured her.

"You love him still, child, do you not?" asked Marie.

"I will tell you, as truthfully as I can, everything," said Lollie. "You cannot tell—it is impossible for any one to know—how ignorant

and foolish I was a year ago. When Mr. Venn said he should like to see me married to a gentleman, I understood nothing—nothing of what he meant. Then I met Philip, and he asked me to marry him. Mamma, I declare that I accepted him only to please Mr. Venn—for no other reason whatever. Then he said I was cold, and wanted me to say I loved him. Of course, I could not say so, because I did not, then. Afterwards, we were married, and we went abroad; and he was kind. I think I began to love him then. But now I always think of the last time I saw him, when he asked my forgiveness, and looked sorry. And since then I have loved him better than ever before. Poor Philip! Perhaps if I had been fitted for him he would have been a better man."

"I think of him always, my daughter," said Philip's mother. "I lie awake and think of him. They took him away from me when he was only one year old. I have seen him, since then, only twice in my life. Once he refused to own me, and once he refused to speak to me. But what woman can forget the little hands that curl round her neck—of her own child? Philip is my son, Lollie. And a mother's love is better than a wife's."

"I wish I loved him more, mamma, for your sake," said Lollie, caressing her.

"Nay, dear. You are the sweetest and best of daughters. My life, now its great hope has failed, would be sad indeed, and lonely, if it were not for you. And we must pray, dear, more and more, for his return to us. I know that he will one day lay his head in my arms, and kiss me himself. Don't ask me how I know it. I am certain. Only I cannot see all the future, and there seems a cloud which I cannot pierce. Somehow, you are not with me, child."

She often talked like this, pouring out what still haunted her of the old negro superstitions.

"I know where he is now, at this moment," she murmured, half closing her eyes. "It is morning with us, but afternoon with him. He is riding alone along the road. The canes are waving each side of him. His face is clouded and angry. He is not thinking of us, Lollie. Alas—alas! he only thinks of himself. The time is not yet come."

Lollie grasped her hand, and cried out. Marie started, and looked round her.

"Kiss me, my daughter. I was far away in Palmiste with my son, our Philip."

Their only visitors were Hartley Venn and his sister, Arthur and Madeleine; and they went nowhere, except sometimes to the opera, which was a necessary luxury to the singer.

"You have changed Lollie altogether, madame," said Hartley, looking at his little girl.

"How am I changed, Mr. Venn?" asked Laura.

"That is what I am trying to find out. You look thinner than you were; but it is not that. You are no taller; so it is not that. I give it up, Lollie."

Marie could have told him. The girl had been, for the first time in her life, living among ladies, and was now a lady herself—such as all the arts of Hartley Venn could not fashion or produce.

"It is only you, Mr. Venn," said Madeleine, "who never change. Oh, that I could tie ropes round you, and drag you away from your chambers, and make you work."

"He does work, Madeleine. He really works very hard," said Lollie.

"Part of your wish has been already anticipated, Miss de Villeroy; for I have met with a grave misfortune."

"What is it?" they cried.

"I have received notice to quit my chambers at the end of the year."

"Oh!" cried Lollie, "the dear old chambers."

"I shall not have the heart to find out new chambers, and so I shall go and live in lodgings. It is sad, after so many years of occupation. I had hoped that my life would be finished there."

"Indeed," said Madeleine, "I think it a very good thing. You men get into a habit of doing nothing, going nowhere, and living three or four in a set, which seems to me destructive of everything. Go into the world and work, Mr. Venn."

"Really, Miss de Villeroy, you carry about so deep an air of resolution and activity that you shame us all. I *will* go into the world and work. What shall I do?"

This was easier to ask than to answer. Besides, Madeleine was at this time intently occupied in considering Arthur's future. He, too, professed a willingness to go into the world and work. But what work? Here was a tall, strong man to be thrown on her hands for life, and what was she to find for him? Arthur said he would work, but he never made the least effort to find work, and went on burying himself in his books, while Madeleine fretted about his useless life.

"Marry me at once, Madeleine," he said, "and I will be your secretary. Will that do?"

"I don't want a secretary," she said.

But she consented to marry him at once, which was all he wanted.

This was in February. The wedding was quiet enough, for they were a comparatively friendless pair. Mrs. Longworthy was there; and in the church, as spectators, Marie and Laura. Madeleine invited them to the breakfast; but this was against Marie's rules, and Laura would not go without her.

When they came back, after a month in Paris, the old life went on just as before. Mrs. Longworthy lived on with them, being one of those old ladies whom it is pleasant to have in the house. Arthur had his study, where Madeleine repaired sometimes in the evening, for those little talks and confidential whisperings which even the most queenly of women are not above liking. But all became as it was before, and the house at Regent's Park was still a favourite place to spend an evening.

"I like it, Arthur," said Madeleine. "It is all so different from what you get anywhere else. I like Madame de Guyon, poor woman, and the noble way she bears her misfortunes. I like

Lollie, with her innocent dependence upon Mr. Venn. And I like that lazy, good-for-nothing Bohemian, who is everybody's friend except his own. They are quaint, delightful people. I suppose the world would object, if the world knew all. But then the world knows nothing. And as for poor little Lollie, our sister-in-law, no one could possibly blame her."

"Surely not. If ever there was an act—"

"No, Arthur. Do not put yourself into a rage about what has been done, and cannot be helped. After all, it was mostly Mr. Venn's fault. Did ever man devise a more absurd training for a girl?"

Came again the spring, and with it the little excursions that Venn was so fond of. But they were not quite the same. The relations between himself and Lollie were altered, somehow. He could no longer kiss her in the old paternal way. Sometimes, as he thought of her, he ground his teeth, and cursed. But ever with her, his voice was soft and kind. He was always thoughtful and anxious about her. She was still, as before all this, his little girl.

Marie grew to love him as if he had been her own son; scolded him for his laziness almost as soundly as Madeleine; went to his chambers,

and brought away great stores of linen, which she and Lollie amused themselves by setting in order for him; made him read her some of his numerous Opuscula, and criticized them in a way which astonished him; and gave him hints and suggestions which opened out vistas of innumerable other literary efforts, so that he formed as many projects as Coleridge.

The spring grew into summer. And then a change was to happen. For one morning the Palmiste mail came in, and Arthur received a letter from his lawyer.

"Your half-brother," he said, "is going on, I fear, as badly as possible. It is my duty—or, rather, I make it my officious duty—to tell you that his only companions are the most dissipated young Englishmen of the colony—officers chiefly. At Fontainebleau there are reported to be nightly scenes of drink and play, which will most certainly end in disaster, if not to fortune, then to health. In this climate, as you know, one has to exercise some discretion. Poor Philip has none. I liked him at first. He landed here fresh and bright, as if he had never touched a bottle of brandy. But that is four months ago, and his face is now bloated with drink and late hours. If you have any influence

over him, write and expostulate. If you, or any friend, could only come out here, all might be well. Philip is open to any influence. He can resist no temptation. He is led away by every voice that he hears. But he is kind-hearted. In an evil hour he insulted little Volet, his manager, whom you remember as a boy. No better or more honest man ever lived. Volet was obliged to resign. Since he went away, Philip has been secretly sending him money to keep him going. I suppose, out of a desire to make atonement. But the estate is going to the dogs. In a few months the hot season will be upon us again, when these excesses will tell more than they do now. I may say that he always speaks of you in terms of the highest respect. He told me, what I did not know before, that the estate is only his own because you refused to fight the case. I think that you might, at least, write to him."

And so on, all in the same strain.

Arthur showed the letter to his wife.

"What shall we do?"

"You must write to him. Say nothing of the past, except what is kind. I will write, too. You will remember that he did once do what I asked him."

"I know—that was because he loved you."

"He did not really love me. He fancied he did. The only woman he ever really loved was Lollie. I am sure of it, from the way he spoke of her, the bitterness with which he remembered the poor girl's look when he cast her off."

"How can you be bitter against a woman you have ever loved?"

"I knew you would say that. It is just what a man would be sure to say. The bitterness, great stupid, was in his own breast; and he thought he felt bitter towards her. Suppose you are bilious. It is not a romantic comparison, but it will do. You see everything yellow. That is how Philip saw things. His real nature was turned inside out. I told you, months ago, that his mind was like your old garden, all overrun with pumpkins.

"What a silly, unreasonable creature he is! Why does he hide his head in a bush, like an ostrich? He is ashamed of his mother—he knows, my dear Arthur, that all the stupid story of the marriage is a forgery. I saw the look he gave her in the church. There was longing and repentance in it, as well as shame. He is stupidly ashamed that his mother is a great singer, as well as that she is coloured. And

what a woman is he ashamed of! Is there one woman in all the world more charitable, more large-hearted, less selfish than poor Marie? Ashamed of her? He ought to be proud of her, and to thank God, who gave him such a mother."

Arthur moved his hand.

"And, oh, Arthur, he is more, ten thousand times more ashamed of himself and his treatment of Laura. I believe that is the secret of all his sins. He wanted at first to make money by gambling, for her. But gambling is a hard master to serve. And then—and then—oh! my poor Phil, what a melancholy ending it all is!"

"It is not ended yet."

She shook her head.

"You do not know," she said, "but I know; because he sent me a letter before he went away, and his landlady brought it. He used to wander about at night, to drink all day. He saw no one. He used to lie on the sofa, with his head in his hands, and groan. He used to see things that do not exist in the daytime. He knew he was dishonoured, poor fellow; and he tried, like a weak creature as he is, to drown it all in drink."

"I blame myself, Madeleine. I should have gone to him, in the old way, and said what I could to help him. Poor Phil is good at heart."

"Good at heart! What is the good of that? Everybody is good at heart. I want men to be strong of will. Women only love strong men."

"Then why do you love me, Madeleine?"

"I don't know, Arthur," she said, smiling. "You know that I love you, dear—do you not? with all the strength of my nature. But then you are strong in all good things. I believe in your nobleness, dear. God knows, if man and wife cease to believe in that, there can be nothing left. . . . . Let us go and see madame."

They got there in time for luncheon. Venn was lying lazily on the sofa. He did not get up as they came in; but held out his hand, smiling.

"You come like a breath of the most invigorating breeze, Mrs. Durnford. Do not reproach me. I am hard at work, trying to make out, with Lollie here, what it is I am to work at."

"I tell him he ought to practise at the Bar," said Lollie.

"So I would, but for two things. I know no

solicitors, and I know no law. Bless you, if I had a brief I should be obliged to put it into a drawer for a couple of years while I read law. No. Think of something else."

"What do rich men do?" asked Marie. "They seem always at work."

"They become Directors. Then they make speeches. They take chairs. They do all sorts of things for nothing, which poor men get paid for. They even write for the magazines, confound them!"

"Write a novel," said Madeleine.

"Eh?" cried Venn, starting up. "Now, that is a practical suggestion. Lollie, do you remember the novel we wrote together, and buried close above Teddington Lock? That was real work, if you like. Oh, if we had not buried that novel!"

"Let us go and fish for it," cried Lollie, laughing.

"We will. We will go at once. Mrs. Durnford, you will come too. We will go this afternoon. The sun shines. The bluebottle buzzes. The lilac is in blossom. The lark will be singing. The laburnum is golden. Lollipops, put on your hat—your summer hat, with the brightest feather in it. We will have a glorious day."

Madeleine made a sign to Marie.

"You three go," she said. "Madeleine will stay with me, and you shall have a late dinner at nine. Go away, all of you, and leave us two to make ourselves miserable together."

"What is it, dear?" she asked.

For all answer, Madeleine gave her the lawyer's letter.

Marie read it, and the tears came into her eyes.

"What are we to do?" asked Madeleine.

"I knew it was coming. I have had presentiments. I have had dreams. I dreamed that I saw my brother Adolphe—poor Adolphe, I wonder if he is living yet—putting a gri-gri under Philip's head. That is to produce disaster, you know. Every night my thoughts carry me back to Fontainebleau. George Durnford speaks to me in visions. And every night I see Philip's face averted. My dear, since I saw him, I have felt myself en rapport with him. You may laugh as you will; but as he suffers, I suffer. When he is wretched, lonely, repentant—I am sad. I hide it from that poor child, who does not know what such love means, and thinks she loves Philip because she pities him. And as I

look forward, I see nothing but clouds and blackness. A great disaster is before me—that is, before Philip. Day by day, the yearning has become stronger in me to go out and try to save my boy. If I go, I may find him in the midst of his companions, drunken and dissolute. He may drive me away with hard words. He may— But he will not, he will not, Madeleine. I feel that the hour for reconciliation is drawing near. I shall see my boy. I shall feel his cheek to mine. I shall be able to put my arms round his neck, and kiss him. Oh, child, child! if ever God gives you a son, pray—pray—pray that you may not suffer what I am suffering now."

She was silent for awhile, struggling with her emotion.

"Do you think that God is punishing me? I cannot think that. I have learned long since my sin, and been forgiven. Of that I am as sure as if a voice from Heaven had pronounced my pardon. I know it from my own heart. My Father has forgiven the sin of an ignorant childhood. It cannot be that. Then what is it?—what is it? I lived but for him. All those years when I toiled in Italy, trying to improve the defects of my education, all those

years when I sang upon the stage—it was all for Philip. I lived upon nothing—my money all went into the bank for him. I waited for the day when I could say to him—'Son, son, take all I have, and be happy. Only kiss your mother—if only it be once, and to let her go away.' I never thought to be to him what most mothers are to their children. I prayed only for a kind thought, a kind word. I got none. And now, what are all my riches worth? I have no son."

"You have Laura. You love her."

"Yes—I am wicked. I forget, in my selfish passion. I love this child, who loves me. There is no better girl in the world than my daughter. But, Madeleine, I want my own child—my very own: the baby that lay in my lap—my own life's blood—my darling, my gallant son! Do not tell me that he has fallen from his ideal. He suffers, and would rise again, if he could. Let me go to him. Let me try once more to gain his love, all alone, by the verge of that great forest where I wandered one night all alone, and saw visions of the future. Did I ever tell you? I went out, with the first money I ever earned at singing, by myself. I crept at night through the woods.

I found George Durnford weeping for his dead wife—not me, dear Madeleine. I was bitter and cruel. Then I saw poor Adrienne, white, pale, and imploring, before me, and I was softened. I saw the children. Arthur clung to me and kissed me, in his pretty way. My own boy, my Phil, turned his face away and cried. It was an omen, and my heart fell. I left George Durnford, and went back as I had come, through the forest. All the night, as I walked along in the black darkness, I heard voices saying to me that there should be no happiness for me—nothing but bitterness, disappointment, and misery."

"But you have found happiness, dear Madame de Guyon."

"Yes, yes; but not the happiness I wanted. There is nothing that I desire but the love of my son—nothing but to hear him say that he is sorry for the words he spoke.

"Play to me, dear. Soothe me with music, for my spirit is troubled."

Madeleine played, while Marie walked up and down, with fingers interlaced, trying to recover from her agitation.

Presently she sat down, close to the piano.

"Don't leave off, my dear. It soothes me

as nothing else can. I am determined what to do. I will go out by the next mail. That starts in a few days, and I shall pack to-morrow—take my ticket, and go."

As she spoke, a wailing was heard from the next house in the street, of a child. She shrank back, with a white face.

"That is the worst sign you can hear."

"Do not be superstitious," said Madeleine. "If you had heard the child cry at any other time you would have laughed."

"At any other time—yes. That I *am* superstitious is true, my dear. I can never shake it off. Call it what you please, weakness, prejudice. I was made superstitious when I was a child, and the old fears cling to me like—like the colour of my birth."

They spent the day making preparations. There were not many wanted, for Marie was a woman whom stage experience had taught to be profuse in dress.

"Lollie will go and live with Miss Venn," she said. "Yes, dear, I know what you were going to offer, and it is very kind of you; but it is better for the present that she should not go into society. I do not want her to feel things."

"She would not feel anything. She is quite convinced that she was properly married at first."

"It is not only that. People might ask who Mr. Philip Durnford was, and — and —oh! Madeleine, do you not see that I am right?"

"You are always right, dear madame."

In the evening the party came back—Venn, at least, happy. They had been fishing for the novel, and failed to find it. Lollie had caught a gudgeon, Arthur had caught nothing. And so on, childishly happy, as they always were when Venn was with them—the man who never lost his delight in childish things.

And so, after their late dinner, Venn thought it was time to go.

"Stay a moment, dear Mr. Venn," said Marie. "I have something to say. Will Miss Venn take our child for a little while?"

"Mamma!" cried Lollie.

"Yes, dear. We have had a letter from Palmiste. I am going out."

Laura turned white.

"And I so happy to-day. It is wicked. Is he ill? Tell me."

"We will tell you everything, dear," said

Madeleine. "Philip is not well, and the news is not good."

Laura gave a great gasp.

"And I shall go, too—shall I not, Mr. Venn? Who ought to be with a man who is ill but his wife?"

They looked at each other, and were silent.

Venn spoke first.

"Lollie, dear, let me talk to you alone for a moment."

He took her into another room.

"Would you like to go, my dear?" he said, folding her in his arms in the old fashion, while her head leant upon his shoulder. "Would you like to go? Remember all. He has treated you cruelly—"

"But he asked my forgiveness."

"And he said himself that you had better be away from him for a while. My dear, your husband is not a good man. He has done bad things. When he comes back, with his mother, and asks to be taken into your arms again, I shall not be one to refuse him forgiveness. But he does not ask for you, or his mother either. If humiliation is to fall on the one who goes out to him, do not let it be you."

"He will think I have forgotten him. As if I ever could forget him," she pleaded.

"Do you love him, Lollie?"

"Always the same question. I love him as I always did, no more and no less. But he is my husband."

Venn choked a spasm of intense jealousy.

"Love him still, dear. Love your husband. But you must not go to him. Will you be guided by me?"

"I am always guided by you. Whoever else have I in the world?" she said, simply. "As if I did not love you better than all the world."

"My dear little girl," he whispered, because his voice choked — "ever my dear little girl, are you not? Nothing can part us. Nothing shall sever the love we have for each other. But you will stay with Sukey, while madame goes out and tries to recover her son for all of us."

He went back to the others, leaving Lollie there.

Then they arranged things; and next day he went to see Sukey, telling her only that Madame de Guyon had business in Palmiste, her native place. For there was sad deceit and hiding of the truth necessary, and only the little circle themselves knew all the history that bound them together with ties so sacred and so sad.

The day she went away, Marie sought Hartley Venn alone.

"I know," she said, "that evil will come to me. I feel it like the cold wind before the rain. But good will come, too. See, now, dear Mr. Venn, there is but one thing I have to say. You will find at my lawyer's, in case—in case I never come back—my will. To whom should I leave my money but to my Philip's wife?"

CHAPTER XII.

WEARIED in body and mind, Marie landed at the old familiar wharf at Port St. Denys. Five and twenty years since last she stood there, filled with the bitterness of regret, and yet the confidence of youthful hope.

She recalled now the moment when, standing on the deck, she marked the mountains growing fainter and darker as the sun set, plunging them in a bath of light and colour, till night came on, and they disappeared. Now she stood once more on the wharf, and marked the old things little changed. The half-naked Indians rolled the sugar-bags about, and piled them in great heaps, with their shrill cries and wild laughter, just as she remembered to have watched them as a child. Under the trees on the Place sat the same old men — or they seemed to be the same—who had always sat there, talking and squabbling over the little politics of the day. Among the talkers under the trees, rolled and played the little naked mulatto and Indian children, as they had always done; and in long line stood the carriages waiting to be hired, as they had stood a quarter of a century since. Nothing was changed; and for a moment the years rolled back, and all her youth flashed again before her, with its happiness, such as it was, and its regrets. Only for a moment. One of the ship's officers, seeing her standing alone, proffered his assistance, and Marie woke to a sense of the dismal errand on which she had come.

"I have got your boxes on shore, Madame de Guyon," he said; "what shall I do with them next? You had better let me get you a carriage. Have you no friends waiting for you?"

"No," said Marie. "I am going into the country. It is a long drive. Will you kindly see that the man has good horses? I am going quite to the other side of the island."

"You are surely not going alone, Madame de Guyon?"

"Not alone! Why not? Oh, I have never told you that I was here as a girl. I know every road in the place, I believe. Thank you, Mr. Hatton, for your kindness. If you will only, now, get me a carriage."

Presently came rattling up a long, low carriage, with a pair of screws that looked like anything in the world except going a long journey.

Marie said something to the officer, who spoke to the driver. He was a mulatto, approaching very nearly to the negro type, with woolly head, and face almost black. He was apparently about fifty, and was accompanied by a little boy, clothed chiefly in a ragged straw hat, half a jacket, and say a quarter of a pair

of cotton trousers. He answered the officer's objections, laughing and protesting in a patois that made Marie's heart leap within her, for it was the patois that she had first learned to speak. She understood it all, after these long years: the intonation of the voice, the gestures which eked out the imperfections of the language, the rough, rude inflexions of the barbaric tongue; and she asked herself whether, in the far past, she herself could have been as these naked children rolling in the dust, could have talked this jargon, could have been such as her driver. Getting into the carriage, however, she explained to him that she was to go to the estate of Fontainebleau.

"How, madame?" said the man. "No one lives at Fontainebleau since Mr. Durnford died."

"You know the place, then?"

"I was born there, madame. My parents lived close by." He called them his "papa and mamma," this grizzly mulatto.

"But Mr. Philip Durnford lives there now."

"Madame wants to see Mr. Philip? Oh!"

He jumped upon his box, called the boy, whipped up his horses, and went swinging down the street at full galop. The boy kept prattling

to him, but he made no answer. When they had gone some three or four miles, taking advantage of a hill, he turned round, and poking his head into the carriage, he remarked, in a tone as if he were conveying information—

"Madame is going to see Mr. Philip Durnford."

Some five or six miles farther on, he put his head in again—

"Does madame know Mr. Philip?"

Marie said she had seen him.

"A mauvais sujet, madame. Alphonse, take the reins. Do not whip them, my child. I will tell you, madame. Ah! brigand, you want to repose already? Up then. Alphonse, take the whip to that vaurien." This was addressed chiefly to his horses. "Madame, I am about to tell you, Mr. Philip—why do I say monsieur?—he is the son of old Mr. Durnford, who died in the cholera, and the little Marie. Pah! everybody knows that."

Poor Marie!

"Philip goes to England with Mr. Arthur. *There* was a young man, madame. Philip stays for seven, eight years. He comes back without Mr. Arthur. He says the estate is his; and he lives there."

"Who was Marie?" asked the poor mother.

"Marie? I will tell you, madame. There was a young lady, white as a lily, who lived in the great house close by my father's hut. She was lonely, and had no one to play with, and so they took my little sister, who was almost as fair as she was—"

"Your sister! You are Adolphe?"

"Madame knows my name? See, madame." He produced a sort of card, on which was printed a tariff of prices. It was inscribed with the names, in full, "Monsieur Adolphe Napoleon Rohan de Montmorenci." This he read out with unction. "How did madame know my name? My nephew, who went to the great college, gave me the surnames; for I must confess to madame, who knows everything, that I was formerly plain Adolphe. Alphonse, with all your force, flog that vieux scelerat who will do no work."

The intelligent steed, hearing this, instantly quickened, and Alphonse put back the whip.

"Yes, madame," he resumed, "Marie was as fair-cheeked as Mademoiselle Adrienne herself. Only mademoiselle had light hair, and Marie black. Droll, was it not? I was as black as Alphonse here, and so was my brother Alcide; and Marie was as white as a lady.

Eh, the vieux papa used to laugh when he looked at her. Only the priest said it was the will of God. Well, madame, Marie went to live with mademoiselle, and stayed there till she was fifteen years old. Then she ran away."

"Where did she go to?"

"Oh, I know, because I saw her often enough. She lived for a year in a little cottage close by Mr. Durnford's house, in the forest. There she had a baby, white as—— as——" here his eyes wandered to little Alphonse for a suitable simile, but, not finding one in his brown face, he turned back to the carriage—"as white as madame herself."

"Well?"

"Well, madame, that baby is Philip himself. You could hardly believe it, but it is so. And I who sit here am his uncle. Ha! ha! ha! Alphonse is his cousin. Ho! ho! ho! But it's droll."

"And—and—your sister?"

"Mr. Durnford married ma'm'selle, and poor Marie went away. She came back, though, and walked all the way to Fontainebleau through the forest—Alcide saw her—on the night after Madame Durnford was buried. Then she went away again, and no one has heard of her since. Poor

Marie! She was too good for us, and the bon Dieu took her to heaven."

"Good? When she lived with Mr. Durnford?"

"Eh?" said the black, "why not? Ah! she was gentille. You should have seen her, madame, go to church with her white kid gloves, and her silk parasol, and a rosebud in her hair. All the white folks stared at her. Poor Marie! But the bon Dieu has taken her, and her son is a vaurien. Alphonse, if the idler does not go quicker, get down and kick him."

The idler instantly quickened, repentantly.

"He is a vaurien, I say, madame. He drinks in the morning, he drinks all day, he drinks at night; and he goes to bed—saoul. No one goes to see him. He lives alone, he sees ghosts, he laughs and cries. The servants run away. Last week one ventured to sit up and watch him all night. He gets up, takes a pistol, and—ping!—if the boy had not ducked his head, like this, he would have been killed. Alphonse, thou laughest? Malin! He is very dangerous, madame. And madame is going to see him?"

Presently they left the high road, and turned down a rudely-made lane, cut through the forest. The still, quiet air recalled all the old moments to Marie. She remembered when

George Durnford, her lover, made the road; and here, before it was finished, he would walk and talk with her in the evening, telling her a thousand things she had never dreamed of, opening up paths for her thoughts which she had never suspected, lifting her above the petty things that she had been accustomed to feed her mind with, and filling her mind with a happiness that was all the sweeter as it was the newer and more unexpected. Forgetting her present miseries, an involuntary smile wreathed her lips, and her eyes glowed again with the brightness of her youth, as she thought of those days, all too brief, of love and tenderness. Do women ever repent of first love? I think not. The man repents, thinking of the wreck he has made of a woman's happiness. She weeps, not for the folly and the sin, but for the shattered image, the perished hopes, and the cruel punishment. Guilt? What guilt was there in the young mulatto girl, who, knowing that she could never be aught but the white man's mistress, yet ran willingly into his arms, and obeyed the instincts of a passionate nature that knew no religion and had no sense of a higher duty? Thousands of times had poor Marie, in the height of her popularity and fame, pondered over the question; and, against all the

dogmas of creed, had acquitted herself. And thousands of times, besides, had she willingly acquiesced in the results of the social necessity under which we are all slaves.

The road, winding through thick underwood, presently crossed a rude wooden bridge over a small ravine. Marie made the driver stop, and leaned out of the carriage, looking at a scene she remembered so well. On the steep, damp sides, towering above the tangled herbage, grew the tall tree ferns, each with its circle of glory, clear cut against the blue of the sky; along the foot bubbled a little mountain stream over great boulders that lay strewn about. Just above the bridge was a tiny waterfall of some three or four feet, over which the water leaped merrily, with as much fuss and splash as if it were a great Niagara. And above the fall, huddled together and gazing with suspicious eyes on the carriage, stood a herd of twenty or thirty soft-eyed deer. But not on them were Marie's eyes resting; for half hidden within the trees stood the remains of an old cottage, the thatch half torn off, and covered with creepers, the door hanging by one hinge, the door-posts wrenched out by the force of a growing tree, and the whole place presenting a dreary look of desolation. Calling

Adolphe, she pointed it out to him, with a look of interrogation.

"It is the cottage of Marie, madame. That is where Mr. Durnford put her when she left ma'm'selle. He thought no one knew. But *I* knew, and many a time I've lain down there watching Mr. Durnford coming to call her out. Every evening he used to come, and all day long Marie used to sit and wait, looking along the path where he would come."

It was so true; and her heart was pierced to think how this poor fellow, her own brother, not ashamed of her disgrace, would lie and wait to see her lover come.

"Mr. Durnford taught her to read, madame; and then she used to sit at the window with a book all the day, and at night would tell him all she had learned. Eh? I have listened often at the window. But it did not last long. Then she went away; and then she came back. And then—I don't know where she went. The bon Dieu took her."

"Why do you think she is dead?"

"Madame, I will tell you. Because — how long ago? Alphonse, how old are you?"

"How should I know?" said the boy.

"Well, it was twelve years before Alphonse

was born. I was down here, it was the cholera time. Ouf! what a time! No one died here except Mr. Durnford; but the night he died I was passing through this road, and in the moonlight just here, I saw two figures in white—one was Marie and the other was Mr. Durnford. Since then, no one has passed by here at night."

"How do you know it was Marie?"

"What a droll question. As if I should not know my own sister."

They went on, and, as they drew near the house, Marie began to think what she should say to her son, and how she would be received. Her long voyage was ended, but the uncertainty of it remained yet. Nor had she ever realized until now the almost utter hopelessness of her journey. She was to save her boy. But how? By what subtle art was that ruined nature to be raised—that seared conscience to become softened? Alas! she knew not that what she hoped to effect by pleading, the mystery of pain and suffering was even then accomplishing.

The carriage drew up in front of the verandah. She got out, and told the driver—her brother—to put down her boxes, and to drive back.

No one received her. It was strange. In

the old days, when a visitor arrived, troops of servants came running. Now, not one. The verandah, too, once like a well-ordered apartment, with its matting, the blinds, the long chairs and little tables, now stood stripped of all. The floor of concrete was in holes. The old ropes of the blinds hung helplessly about. Creepers climbed up the posts, and trailed along the woodwork of the roof. Outside, the pretty rose garden was all destroyed, and grown over. The mill beyond was closed. There was no sign of work or noise from the adjacent "camp," which seemed deserted; no voice from the house within, no barking of dogs, or clattering of hoofs. A strange dread came upon Marie. She shivered from head to foot. It was too late to recall her carriage, which was now out of sight, and almost out of hearing. And with a dull foreboding of sorrow she entered the house which, four and twenty years ago, she had quitted with such repentance and regrets.

The old furniture was there, in its old places; but dust-covered, mildewed, and uncared for. No one was in the salon, no one in the dining-room. Avoiding the rooms to the right, which had been those of George Durnford, she went into the smaller bed-rooms on the left, put up

originally for children and guest-rooms. These, with all their old furniture, which she remembered so well, had yet a dreary and desolate look. Only, in one, provided with a deal table, a bookcase, and a few chairs, lay the relics of the days when her son, whom she had seen so seldom, was yet but a child. In one corner were the broken toys of the two boys. On the shelves lay the old well-thumbed grammars and school books. Damp had loosened the bindings; white ants had burrowed long passages through them; the cockroaches had gnawed away the leather; and when she moved them, a whole colony of scorpions ran out, brandishing their tails in frantic assertion of their long-established rights. She turned away sorrowfully, and once more entering the dining-room, went in, with sinking of heart, to the great bed-room beyond. The silence and stillness of the house oppressed her. It seemed haunted with ghosts of the days gone by; and, added to this was the dread of something, she knew not what, which she might find within.

Twice she tried to turn the handle of the door; twice her heart failed her. She went to the well-known buffet in the dining-room, where water always stood, and drank a glass of it.

That, at least, in its red earthenware vase, was the same as ever. Then she resolutely opened the door, and went in.

On the bed—ah, me! the bitterness of punishment—on the great bed, which had once been her own and George Durnford's, lay, pale and motionless, her only son, stricken even unto death. Alone and uncared for. With dry, parched lips, that sometimes murmured a wail, and sometimes moved to let fall some wild words of delirium, with bright rolling eyes, Philip was waiting for the approach of death. This was written on his forehead in unmistakable signs. He was not even undressed. It appeared as if he had thrown himself upon the bed with his clothes on, and, in the passion of fever, had torn his shirt-collar open, and tried ineffectually to take off his upper clothing. And though the fever made his brow and his hands burning hot, he shivered occasionally, and his teeth chattered with cold.

Marie took in the whole at a glance. Stepping back to the dining-room, she hastily brought water and gave him to drink, and bathed his burning face. He drank eagerly, and as long as she would let him. Then she opened the windows, for the air was stifling;

and then — what hands are so tender as a mother's?—she undressed him, and managed to make him at least a little easier. And when all was done—her patient rambling incoherently —she knelt by the bedside and prayed, with passionate sobs and tears, that if her son was to die, she might at least be permitted to breathe a few words—only a few—out of the fulness of her heart, into his listening ear. Presently she recovered, and went in search of help. The silence and stillness were inexplicable. At the back of the house, behind the stables, stood the huts for the servants. Thither she went. They were empty. A hundred yards from the house, close by the road, stood the huts which formed the "camp"—a little village for some eight hundred folk. It was empty and deserted. The shop was closed—the stables were empty. What could it all mean?

Coming back to the house, she went to the kitchen. This stood by itself, a small stone building. There she found a fire, and crouching by the fire, though it was an afternoon in the height of summer, sat an Indian boy, who only moaned when she touched him. He, too, had fever. She took him up—a light burden enough

—and carried him to a room next to Philip's, where she tended him, and laid him in the only bed he had ever slept in in his life. Fortunately, he was not delirious, and from him she learned something of what had happened.

The luckless Philip had taken to drinking all day long, and almost all night. He had become moody, irritable, and capricious, so that the very men who came for the coarse revels that went on there grew tired of him, and left off coming at all. Then, having no companions and no resources, he became every day worse. Once, the nearest doctor, an old friend of his father's, rode over to see him; and after his departure Philip improved for a short time. He even sent for his lawyer, and gave him instructions to sell the estate. No purchaser came for it. The crop was put through the mill and sent up to town; and after it, the unhappy man, growing mad with the dreadful life he lived, resolved to have nothing more to do with the estate, and actually took steps to get rid of his coolies, in which he had almost succeeded. And for two months the canes had been uncared for, the fields almost left to themselves. He said he was going back to England. As they

learned afterwards, there was still a large sum of money left out of Arthur's savings. As for the estate, Philip declared, with many oaths, that if no one would buy the place no one should work in it. And then he reduced his private establishment. Two boys and a cook were all he kept; while for two long months he wandered gloomily about his deserted estate, and at night drank himself into a state of insensibility. And then, one night, he was stricken with fever. The cook and one of the boys ran away in terror. The other would have followed, but that fever seized him, too, and held him down.

Marie gathered this partly from the sick boy, and partly from what she heard afterwards. Going into the camp again, she found some bustle and noise. Thank Heaven! there was some one. As she learned afterwards, the whole body of the remaining coolies had struck work that very day, and gone off together — men, women, and children—to complain to the nearest magistrate about getting no wages. Now they were all returned, and, gathered in knots, discussed their grievances. Marie called a sirdar, and despatched him, with a handsome gratuity beforehand, for the nearest doctor. This done,

she returned to her patients, the Indians gazing curiously at her.

The boy told her where some tea could be got, and she hastily prepared it for Philip, who lay quietly enough. He was too weak to move, poor fellow; and only murmured incessantly. He drank the tea, however, and then fell asleep, when Marie was able to leave him, and doctor the little Indian, who was almost as ill as his master. Slowly the hours passed. She marked the sun set, as, long ago, she had often watched it, behind the hills in front of the house. She saw the moon rise in the dear old tropical lustre; the cigale shrieked its monotonous note; the watchman began to go his rounds, and cry "All's well!" the same as he had always done; and, but for the heavy breathing of the poor stricken prodigal, her son, she could almost have thought the four and twenty years since last she sat there a dream. About nine o'clock a deputation waited on her. She knew the rustling of the muslin and the clink of the bangles, and went out on the verandah to receive her visitors. Some half-dozen Indian women stood there. One bore a dish of curry for madame. All wanted to know what they could do for her; all were curious to learn who she

was, and why she had come; and all looked on her with a sort of superstitious dread. Their husbands accompanied them as far as the garden hedge, but would go no farther; and now stood, prepared to fly in case of any supernatural manifestations. None occurred, however. Marie asked if two of them would stay with her, and accepted the curry gratefully. It was the first thing she had taken since the early morning coffee, and a long night was before her.

The women were horribly afraid of the fever. They would do anything for madame in the house—they would sleep on the verandah; but nothing would induce them to go into the rooms of the sick. However, it was something, in her desolation, to have even them with her; and, with a sense of companionship, she went back to watch her charges. The boy at last fell asleep, and she brought a chair and sat by Philip's bedside, watching his deep breath come and go.

The two women outside, curled under a blanket, chattered for a while, and then fell asleep. The watchman at first made a great show of wakefulness, expectorating loudly every time he passed the doors of the bedroom; finally, he, too, subsided into his usual

corner and fell fast asleep, with his long stick in his hands. The dogs began by barking against each other, but gradually grew sleepy and left off. The cocks, who disregard all times and seasons in Palmiste Island, loudly called for the sun about midnight. As he declined to appear at their bidding, they tucked their heads in again, and had another nap. And then the silence of the forest seemed to make itself felt; and Marie, her old superstitions coming back in all their force, almost gasped with the tension of her nerves. The room filled with ghosts—not ghosts that filled her with terror so much as regret. Her long-dead mistress, Adrienne, with long, floating light hair, seemed to be hovering in white robes in the moonshine; the faces of old acquaintances laughed at her from the dark corners of the room; or the still, sleeping face of Philip would suddenly change into the face of her dead lover. Voices, too, were whispering about her, till she could bear it no longer, and went out into the open air, to pace the verandah, and look upon the old familiar scene bathed in the silver moonlight.

Then she came back and prayed again—in the Catholic faith that had reared her—to the

Madonna. What matter if no Madonna heard her? The prayer was the same to God, who hears all prayers and seems to grant so few. Does any one ever get all he prays for? I trow not. And yet we pray—pray against hope and certainty—though we see the advent of the Inevitable, and *know* that God will not turn it aside for any prayers or vehement calling-out of ours. But still we pray; and when the hand of death is on the nearest and dearest to us, when all that makes life sweet is to be torn from us, we betake ourselves to our knees, and so we go on praying till the world's end, despite the calm persuasion of the philosopher, and the experience of a life. Only, by prayer we soften our hearts; and it seems as if God answers us by alleviating the blow, and giving some comfort while our sorrow is at its bitterest.

So, while Marie prayed, it seemed to her, in the dim light, as if the face of the sick man altered and softened. The fierce heat of the fever died away, his brow grew damp and chill, his hands soft and warm, and his breathing calm and regular. And, for the time, she fancied that her prayers were heard indeed.

Do you know that moment in the night—the passage, as it were, from day to day—when

a chill breath seems to pass over the earth, and for a space all the world is hushed as if in death? You may feel it by sea or by land. I have shivered and trembled under its spell, while gasping for breath in the sulphureous Red Sea. Or in the heart of London, should you be awake, you lie and feel that yesterday is dead indeed, and the new day not yet fully born. This is the time when feeble old men and children die; and when death seems most terrible.

At this moment Philip woke. And at sight of his eyes the mother's heart leapt up, and she thanked God; for one part of her prayer, at least, was answered. For the delirium was gone, and her son was in his right mind. She did not dare to speak, while, on her knees at the bedside, she looked him face to face, and met his eyes, which gazed wonderingly into hers, so full of tears and tender love.

"There are so many ghosts," he murmured, "about this house, that I suppose you are another. You are the ghost of my mother."

"Ah, no. Herself," she cried out. "No, my son, your own mother herself come to nurse you—your own loving mother. Oh, my boy, my darling—forgive me!"

"I am weak," he said, "and my head is con-

fused. Touch me, that I may know you are not phantom of my brain. Kiss me, my mother."

She showered a thousand kisses on his poor thin cheeks; she took his head in her arms, and bathed it with her tears—those precious woman's tears, not all of repentance, but some of thankfulness and love, like those that once washed Our Saviour's feet, till Philip's heart, softened by suffering, broke down, and he wept aloud.

But then her fears took alarm, and she quickly dried her eyes. And when he would have spoken—when he would have answered some of her love with repentance and prayers —she forbade him to utter a word.

"Not yet, my son—not yet," she said. "To-morrow we will talk. Now, sleep again—or, stay a moment."

She went to the old buffet in the dining-room, and found some claret, of which she made him take a few drops. This brightened his eyes for a moment; and then, overcome with his weakness, he fell asleep once more. Her heart danced within her—she could not sit still. Leaving him sleeping, she went out again to the verandah, and watched the coming dawn.

The moon was down by this time; and save the Southern Cross, paling before the coming day, all the stars were gone. Only the bright morning star was left in the east. The birds began to twitter in the trees, just in their dreams —as she remembered long ago—before the dawn; and the sweet words of the poet came into her mind:—

> "Ah! sad and strange, as in dark summer dawns
> The earliest pipe of half-awakened birds
> To dying ears, when unto dying eyes
> The casement slowly grows a glimmering square:
> So sad, so strange, the days that are no more."

And she was sitting with the memories of bygone days; with her dying son in his last sleep—save the longest—while this gray summer dawn crept slowly up the east.

Slowly; but it came. First a dull gray, and presently a silver gray; and then those long, marvellous fingers of light which spread themselves out upon the world as though they would fain seize it, and make it their own. And then the rocks, which had been black, grew purple; the mist upon the nearest peak, which had been a cloud, became a bridal veil, drawn loosely round, and falling in a thousand folds upon the

woods below. And then a few short minutes of bright green, and red, and gold, and the great sun bounded into the sky with a single leap, and another day was born to the world. And then the birds all flew about to greet the sun; from the woods chattered the monkeys; the lizards woke up, and began to hunt about for the hottest places, blinking at the light; the dogs from the camp resumed their musical contest in Amæbean strains, just where they had left it off the previous night; the cocks began to crow, and make a great triumph, as if they had compelled the sun to come back by their own personal efforts; the turkeys began to strut about with a great babbling and cackle; the mules came out and rolled in the cane straw; the mosquitoes all went away to bed; and the women's voices began, in the way she knew so well—the women always seemed to waken first—to rail at their lords from the huts of the camp. Her own two companions of the night shook themselves together, and greeted her kindly. She set them to make some tea, and sat with her hands crossed, looking before her at the bright and hopeful morning.

Presently she remembered her little Indian, and went to look at him in his bed. Alas! alas!

the poor child was dead. Without a sound, or she would have heard it through the open door, his spirit had gone from him in the night; and he lay, cold and stiff, in the careless grace of sleeping childhood—his head pillowed on his arm, his eyes closed. Struck with terror, she turned to the other room. There, at least, was sleep—kinsman, but not friend, of death. And sitting patiently by the bedside, she resumed her watch.

The hours passed on, the sun grew high; but still he slept. About ten arrived the doctor—she had simply sent for the nearest doctor; but she recognized an old friend of George Durnford's, and went to meet him as an acquaintance.

He took off his hat—Doctor Staunton—and seeing an unknown lady who held out her hand, took it with great astonishment.

"Pardon me, madame, I—"

"Oh, Doctor Staunton, you have forgotten me, then? But come in quickly."

He went in without a word, and began to listen to her account of his patient.

"It is a bad case, madame—a very bad case. I ought to have been sent for four days ago. If you are interested in him—"

"Interested? Oh! Doctor Staunton, is it

possible you have forgotten me? I am his mother."

"You—Marie? Can it be, indeed? I thought you dead. Tell me about yourself. My poor child—I mean—"

"Never mind, doctor. People call me Madame de Guyon. But tell me about my son."

"Madame de Guyon? Is it possible that you are—"

"Yes—I am the singer. But now tell me about my son."

"Marie—be strong—strong to bear the worst. He cannot live. No human art can save him."

She sat down, dry-eyed.

"When will he die?"

"We cannot tell. Perhaps in an hour—perhaps in two. He will die before the evening. I will stay with you to the end."

She covered her face with her hands—not to weep, but to keep back the hard, rebellious thoughts that surged up in her bosom. In a few moments she stood up, and began to busy herself about her boy, smoothing his pillows, and laying the sheets straight.

"I heard," she said, "in England—Arthur Durnford told me—that he was being led away by bad companions. I am sure his heart was

good. I came out, thinking to try and save him. I find him dying. Oh, doctor, save him! You loved George Durnford, who loved me—for his sake, save him. In all his life, since he was a baby—since I gave him up to his father, this is only the third time I have seen him. And, Doctor Staunton, he loves me still. Oh, save him!"

"Marie, I cannot."

"And why"—she turned fiercely upon him—"why did you not save him before, for his father's sake? Why, when you knew that he was here, and—that he was not what he should be, did you not come and reason with him? Oh!" she added, bitterly, "I know the reason — I had almost forgotten, after four and twenty years of England, that his mother was a mulatto."

"I swear, Marie," said the old doctor, earnestly, "that you wrong me. I came here—I came twice. The first time—I must tell it you—I was insulted. I came again, and he listened to me. I have been ill myself, and could not come a third time."

"Doctor," cried a weak, thin voice from the pillow, "I thank you, and again I beg your forgiveness."

Marie was at his side in a moment, kissing and fondling him.

"What shall he have, doctor? What will you give him? Tea—oh, here it comes."

Doctor Staunton ordered him some simple things.

"I have heard what you have been saying," said Philip. "I shall die to-day."

"Oh, no, my son—oh, no!—God will not permit it."

"God knows, dear mother, that it is the best thing I can do. Perhaps that is the reason why He lets me do it. Doctor, I have a good deal to say to my mother, and a very little time to say it in. Leave us for a little. But first shake hands with me."

Left alone—

"Kiss me, mother," said Philip. "Tell me that you forgive me. Mother—in my weakness, I implore your pardon."

"Oh, Philip, with all my heart's love I forgive you. You did not know me. You could not know I was your mother, indeed. It was I who was wrong. There is nothing to forgive, dear."

"But there is," he said. "I knew you were my mother, directly you told me so. I *felt* it. But I was proud, and I had just—without

knowing all my wickedness, it is true—robbed Arthur of his inheritance. And I could not bear to give it back again. My heart, too, was bitter with that other wrong I had committed —oh! my mother, a deeper wrong, even, than what I did to you. You may forgive me for one, but you can never forgive me for the other."

"Hush! my boy. It is all forgiven."

"All?" He hardly seemed astonished, and had forgotten how she knew.

"All. Laura told me herself. She bade me take out to you her love and pardon. She implored me to bring her out with me. She says that all she wants now is to hear one loving word from you, to treasure up and hide the memory of all the things you did and said —when you did not know what you were saying, my dear."

Philip turned his face, and wept on the pillow.

"Wipe my eyes, mother. I am so weak that I cannot even do that for myself. And now get some paper, and write a letter for me. But call the doctor first."

Marie went to get the paper. Before she came back, Doctor Staunton had administered a restorative.

"How long?" asked Philip of the doctor.

"Don't talk too much, or you will kill yourself in an hour."

"Good," said Philip. "Write, dear mother—

"'DEAREST WIFE—I have but a short time now to live. With my last breath, I ask pardon of you for the grievous wrongs I have done you. No punishment could be too great for me. My mother tells me you have sent me your forgiveness. My dear, if I could tell you how I have repented—if you knew the bitter remorse that has seized me since I have been in this place! But all is over at last. The great weight is lifted. God has sent my mother with her love and your pardon. I go into the other world. I have no excuse for myself. I have been a bad man, and have led a bad life. Only if God lets me ask anything——'"

"My son!" cried Marie.

"'If God lets me ask anything, I will ask Him to bless you both. This is my only prayer—I dare have none for myself. My dear —my Laura—I am very, very sorry. Think only for the future that I loved you all along.

God bless you, my wife.—Your most affectionate and penitent husband,

'PHILIP.'"

He signed it with feeble fingers, guided by Marie, and then fell back.

"I should like to write to Arthur, but I cannot. Write for me, and tell him how I repented, and ask his forgiveness. MacIntyre wanted me to do it eight years ago, but I refused. You will write, won't you, dear mother?"

She promised.

"Sing to me, dear mother; you sing so well. I should like to hear your voice, once more. Sing me a hymn."

It was a cruel trial. She steadied herself and sang—his head upon her shoulder—with all her fulness and richness of voice, so that the old doctor wiped his brimming eyes at the sound—

"'Abide with me—fast falls the eventide:
The darkness deepens—Lord with me abide.
When other helpers fail, and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless! oh, abide with me.

Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day,
Life's joys grow dim, its glories fade away——'"

His cheek dropped against hers. She stopped in sudden affright.

"Mother," he murmured, very faintly, "is it growing dark? Is it night already?"

"Oh, Philip!"

"I think I am dying—give my love to Laura. Kiss me, mother. Shall we meet again?"

"My boy—in Heaven. I could not go there without you."

His head fell heavily forward. He was dead.

The little Indian boy was buried that same evening, in the Indian cemetery on the hillside. Small funeral rites had he, and no mourners. The man who dug his grave, and carried him under his arm to the place of sepulture, all out of the goodness of his heart and a kind of natural piety, placed a bottle on the grave, so that, should he perchance awake, there might be means of at least slaking his thirst. And in India perhaps his mother waited for him to come, and wondered, looking as the years went by, that he delayed so long. The life of man is short at the best; but the shorter it is, the less of bitterness he knows. Solomon said much the same thing.

Doctor Staunton stayed with Marie. After the first burst of passionate grief, she began, woman-

like, to find her consolation. And the thought that his last few hours were spent in love and repentance; that the memory she would have of her son would not be of cruel insult and wrong, but of tenderness and affection, made her thank God for one great mercy at least.

They buried him the next day, in the nearest English churchyard, close to his father's grave. After his feverish life, it was consoling to his mother's heart to carry with her his last few words of repentance and sorrow. She treasured them up, and when she thought of them, she forgot the cruel scene in London, his harsh words, his tones of mockery and pride, remembering only his tender love at the last, and, when all was over, his calm face set with the sweet, sad, unchanging smile of death.

They buried him as the sun went down into the sea. The fierce heat of a tropical summer day was over; and night, with its perfect calm, was stealing upon the world when the last words of the funeral service were pronounced, and the mould rattled upon the coffin of poor Philip. Marie thought of his life; of the storm and hurricane when she left him with his father and went back alone through the forest; of the blight that his birth had thrown upon him; of

his wasted energies, ruined hopes, and cruel misdeeds; and of the sweet calm and peace of the end. And it seemed to her that this tropical day was an emblem of his life, with its fierce and scorching heat, its turbulent hurricanes, and its peaceful night.

The clergyman read the service, and went away. Then Marie saw that she and the doctor were not the only mourners; for, with their hats off, and kneeling on the sward, were her two brothers, Adolphe and Alcide. Stepping reverently forward, they each threw a handful of mould upon the coffin; their first and last claim at kinship. And then the two poor fellows walked slowly away, and Marie saw them no more.

She went back to the estate, the old doctor keeping her company; and though Palmiste knew that the great singer had been to their island, and was at Fontainebleau when young Durnford died, no one knew on what errand she had come, nor what was her relationship to Philip. Doctor Staunton kept the secret well. Nor did she think it necessary to tell Adolphe Napoleon Rohan de Montmorenci that Marie was not dead, after all. What would have been the use? It was not any false shame. If all the world knew that her brothers were

poor blacks, gaining a living by driving a voiture de place, it would have mattered nothing to her. No one in England would think the worse of her. A singer is not expected to be of unblemished family, more than any other professional person. And what good could she do to her relations? They were happy; they had no wants that they could not satisfy; they had no ambition; they desired nothing, looked for nothing. Moreover, between them and herself so great a gulf was fixed that it could not be passed. And whatever her childhood had been, she was now a lady. Lastly, there was this. Her story no one knew except one or two persons in England, and one person in Palmiste. There was no need for any one to know. She had suffered almost everything that a woman can suffer, except what tortures women most—the loss of her reputation. Blameless and pure in conduct, she had passed through the theatre without a reproach, whispered or spoken. She had learned, soon enough, the value of fair fame, and she was not disposed to give it up. Therefore she kept the secret to herself.

Turning over Philip's papers, she found among them evidences, not only of the power he undoubtedly possessed, but of thoughts which

showed him in a better light—which betrayed the causes of his wreck, the fatal moral wreck which his nature had sustained when he learned, through the man who was his evil genius, that he was illegitimate, and touched with the blood of the lower race.

Philip, until the last few months of his life, had been in the habit of writing; not for papers, or magazines, partly because it never occurred to him to write for them, and partly because he did not write well enough. But his loose papers, heaped together in his desk, written on slips and fragments of paper—sometimes in a few words, sometimes many — sometimes in prose, sometimes in verse—showed that he knew himself capable of good things, and that, though he followed the worse, he approved the better.

She burnt them all but one. This she kept, and sent to Laura. It had no title, and consisted of four stanzas—rough verses enough, but not without an element of power.

"Go, dig my grave for me—
Not where the painted sunshine lights the aisle,
Not where, through glories of the pillared pile,
The silver-voicèd choir
Sing o'er the sacred bones of glorious dead
The strains of David's lyre.

Rather seek out for me
Some village churchyard where the world comes not:
Where mounds ignoble cover men forgot:
  Where the black branching yew
O'erhangs with midnight shade the moss-grown
    stones,
  And hides the graves from view.

Bury me there, and write
No long inscription on a marble stone:
Only a head-cross, with these words alone—
  'He dared not—therefore failed.'
Let the dishonour of a coward heart,
  So set forth, so be veiled.

Let no man weep for me:
Rather rejoice that one whose will was weak
No longer cumbers earth; and when they speak
  (Not with breath bated), say,
God made the world for those who dare be strong:
  Well, that the weak decay!"

She kept these lines only, and on his grave set up the head-cross he wished, with his own words, "He dared not: therefore failed." Under them she wrote—"P. D. Aged twenty-six."

Over his grave, and his father's, wave the tall filhaos, with their long, mournful sough, singing a perpetual lament over the sins and sorrows of the dead. In this forgotten corner of the

world - no longer a memory even in Palmiste, though few years have as yet gone by since he died - he lies at rest. Arthur and his wife, and their children, will perhaps be laid beside him: but not Marie. Another grave is hers—a wider one, but, I think, quite as peaceful.

She sent Philip's last words to Laura and Arthur by the next mail. She stayed to finish what she had to do; left presents for her people, to be given by Doctor Staunton; and embarked again for England in the first homeward-bound ship, happier, if more sad, than when she arrived but a short month before.

CHAPTER XIII.

"MY dearest daughter"—it was the last letter, the one letter, that Laura ever had from Marie—"I send you Philip's last words. It is all over, my child. I cannot write about him yet. But he kissed me at the last, and we prayed together. I have given money to a man, who promises to keep his grave, and to tend the flowers that I have planted. There is a cross at its head, with his initials, and a line that I found in his desk—'He dared not: therefore failed.' It is the story of his life—a poor life, a sinful life, a sorrowful life. He saw what was good, and took what was bad, because it seemed the easiest. In all his faults, he tried to make a compromise between the two. My poor boy! He looked so

handsome, though he was pale and worn at the last; and, as he lay dead, his mouth was set with a sweeter smile than I had ever seen on it in life. Alas! I never saw him smile. I love to think of him so; and to feel that he is with One who is far more merciful than we two women.

"I am delayed by all this business, but I return by the next mail.

"Strange presentiments fall upon me. I cannot sleep at night. If I do, I have dreams and visions. And I feel as if I shall never see you again. But I am not unhappy. God has forgiven us both—my boy and me. I say that again and again; and I comfort myself with thinking how my Philip laid his arms about my neck, and kissed me, at the end.

"One thing I forgot to tell you. You are now the owner of Fontainebleau. You must give it back to Arthur. Make him take it. What is mine is yours, and I am rich. Should I never reach England, all is bequeathed to you.

"I enclose you a lock of Philip's hair. I cut it from his head when I took my last look at his poor, white, dead face. I put up one of mine with it. Tie them up together, dear child, and put them in a locket. Here, too, is a flower

from his grave. And, with it all, his last letter. God bless you, my daughter. Perhaps my forebodings may come to nothing.

"MARIE."

A wild day off the Cape, where the gales are fiercer and the waves longer than in any other part of the ocean. In the midst of the warring winds and mighty waves a gallant ship, tossing and groaning as every successive mountain of gray-green water strikes her. The sailors are holding on by the ropes, the man at the helm is lashed to his post, the captain is giving orders clinging to the davits, and all the passengers, except two or three who are on deck and watching the waves, are below in the saloon. The storm has raged without intermission for three days. They have been driven steadily south, far out of the track of any ship. It is bitterly cold. The men have been all day trying to get up cargo and lighten the vessel. The engines labour heavily. Every now and then the screw, as the ship's stern is lifted out of the water, whizzes round against the air, with a sound that seems to terrify the ship; for she gives a shiver, and then makes another bound forwards, and gallantly tries to right herself.

Now and again a passenger tries to get hold of the captain or one of the officers, and essays to find a crumb of comfort in the assurance that things cannot get worse, and therefore must change soon; but the officers wear anxious faces, and the captain shakes his head when he talks to his chief. Hour after hour goes on, and things get worse: the wind higher, the waves longer. One after the other the passengers creep below into the saloon, and try to cheer each other, with a sickening fear at their hearts. Marie is there, sitting with clasped hands, and calm face, and downcast eyes. The women around her are crying and weeping; the men are sitting with haggard faces, or sometimes looking at each other with a smile; and the storm grows worse. Presently she feels a hand catching at her arm. It is a young girl, going to England to be married. She had not spoken to Marie before. Now, in her misery, she looks round, and finds hers the only face with any courage upon it. Marie rouses herself at the touch, and takes the girl into her arms.

"My poor child," she whispers.

And at the sound of her pitying voice, the girl breaks into a flood of weeping and lamentation.

"Madame de Guyon," she cries, "do you think we are going to be drowned?"

"I don't know, my dear. God knows. He will do what is best for us."

"Pray for us, Madame de Guyon."

Marie prayed—whispering her prayer in the girl's ear. The storm grew louder and fiercer. She had to cling to the back of the saloon seat on which she was resting, and in the middle of her prayer an awful crash was heard. The child—she was little more—shrieked with terror. Marie clasped her the more firmly.

"God, our Father," she whispered, "send us what is best for us."

There was a great stamping and noise upon deck, for the mainmast had been carried by the board; but it was finally cleared away; and presently more noise befell them when the foremast followed. Those in the cabin trembled and shrieked. One or two of the men got brandy, and drank freely to keep up their courage. Four ex-diggers from California sat down to have a final gamble, and, holding the cards firmly in one hand and the brandy in the other, prepared themselves so to leave the world.

But the end was not yet. This was the fore-

noon. The wind abated towards one o'clock, and there seemed a prospect, however distant, of getting through. The diggers gave up their gambling, and grumbled, being half drunk, over the winnings and losings. Those who had been most terrified assumed an air of valour, and the women left off crying. Only the girl clung to Marie, and begged her not to leave her again. The long day crept on. About five, a pretence was made at dinner—whatever could be found to eat being put out. But by this time a good many of the men were drunk, and lying helpless about the seats on the floor; and the women could not eat. The captain came down — a cheery, hearty man. He looked with infinite disgust at his drunken passengers, and hastened to say a few words to Marie and the young lady.

"You seem brave, Madame de Guyon," he said; "and so I tell you that, though we may pull through, I do not think we shall. If the wind rises again to-night, we shall have a rough time of it. Cheer up, my pretty," he said to the girl, "we must hope for the best. And here's the doctor to look after you. He can save us from a good deal, if not from storm and tempest. As for storm and tempest," he mut-

tered, "only the Lord can save us from those; and I don't think the Lord will."

Then the doctor—a young fellow of five and twenty, as brave as if he had fifty lives—sat down and talked to them, making a rough dinner all the while, and trying to cheer up the poor lassie; but without much effect. Presently the sun set—or, rather, the night fell—and darkness came upon them. The stewardess lit one or two of the saloon lamps, and relapsed into a sort of torpor which had fallen upon her. The doctor tried to rouse her up. It was no use. She lifted up her head, and moaned—

"I've been a great sinner—oh! I've been a great sinner!"

"Well, come," said the doctor, kindly—"we all know that, of course; but you might as well do your duty all the same."

But she refused to move. So, the doctor tried himself to minister to his two ladies, without much effect. Indeed, there was little to be done for them.

Marie raised her head, and listened. Then she whispered to the doctor—

"The wind is rising—I feel it coming."

The doctor shuddered. He could distinguish nothing beyond the dull roar of the waves and

the struggling of the ship; for the wind had almost died away. But he listened intently. Presently it came—first a shrill whistle in the shrouds, and then a sort of heavy, dull blow to starboard; and the good ship staggered and reeled.

"God help us!" said the doctor, softly. "We shall not get through this night."

Marie and the girl clung to each other.

"I shall go on deck," said the doctor.

"Come below," said Marie, "if there is time."

He nodded, and went out into the black, howling night.

"Madame," said the girl.

"Call me Marie, dear."

"Marie—call me Lucy. If there were only a clergyman."

"Let me be your clergyman, dear Lucy. God hears us in the storm as much as in the calm. We want no clergyman."

"But—but—oh! I loved him so much—more than God! Do you think He will forgive me? Marie, do you think I can be forgiven?"

"God forgives us all," said Marie. "He has forgiven me. And God has taken my son, and is going to take me. He has forgiven us both—

me and my boy, too. Do you not think he will forgive you?"

"Pray for me again," sobbed the girl.

Marie prayed. Two or three of the women—they were soldiers' wives, poor things, second-class passengers, who had crept aft for better shelter—seeing the girl on her knees and Marie bending over her, slid and crawled over to her, and kneeled round her, while Marie prayed for all.

In the midst of her prayer there was a confused rush and gurgle of waters, and the ship seemed suddenly to stop. In the roar of the tempest, they hardly perceived that it was her engines which had stopped. And Marie, looking up, saw the doctor making his way towards her. Catching one of the iron pillars of the saloon, he bent over, and whispered in her ear—

"The ship will be down in ten minutes."

She nodded, and drew from her breast a little packet, which she handed him. He put it in his pocket; and then, with tears in his eyes, kissed her upturned face, and disappeared up the companion ladder. None of the women noticed it.

Ten minutes afterwards, he found himself clinging to a rope on the deck. Next to him was the chief officer.

"Where's the skipper?" he shouted through the storm.

"Gone overboard. All the rest, too, I think, with the almighty wave that put out our engine fires. Doctor, don't be drowned like a heathen. Say you didn't mean what you said the other night."

"Not I," shouted the doctor. "If I've been wrong, and there is something to come, I won't go sneaking into it with a miserable apology."

The chief officer said no more; because at that moment another wave, striking the ship, washed them both off together into the black sea.

The doctor, recovering his senses, found himself clinging to some portion of the wreck. How he got hold of it, by what instinct, how in the crash and roar when his senses left him he still managed to hold to it, he never knew. It was a black night, and he was alone on the waves. He looked round, but could see nothing.

The morning found him still living. The storm had subsided, and the sun broke fair and warm.

Two days afterwards, a homeward-bound ship saw an object tossing on the sea, and made out that it was a man and a piece of wreck. They

lowered a boat. The man was breathing, but that was all. They took him on board and gave him restoratives. He came to his senses presently, and told his story. And the doctor was the only survivor of the ship. The captain and the crew, Marie and little Lucy, and the passengers, had all gone down together. When they touched at Plymouth, the doctor landed and went straight to Venn with the packet that Marie had put into his hands. It contained nothing but a few memorials of Philip.

Laura had lost her husband and her mother.

CHAPTER XIV.

LAURA continued to stay with Sukey. She made no new friends, and no change in her life. Hartley came to see her nearly every day, and the old daily visit was

so restored, with the difference that he was the scholar.

All her beauty had come back to her: roses to her cheeks, the life and lightness of youth, the sweetness and grace, doubled and trebled by the lessons of sorrow, with that additional charm for which we have no other word than lady-hood.

All were happy, except Sukey, who watched her brother day after day, with feelings growing more and more irritated. At last she spoke. He was in a particularly good temper that morning. Laura was in her own room, dressing to go out with him.

"It's ridiculous, Hartley," cried Sukey, losing all control over herself.

"What is ridiculous, Sukey?"

"I say it is ridiculous, the way you are going on. How long is it to last? And people talking. Even Anne says it's too bad of you."

"My own Sukey, what is it?"

"It's Laura. Has the man got eyes in his head? Are you stupid? Are you blind?"

Hartley turned red.

"Tell me, Sukey—speak plain. Tell me what it is you mean?"

"Oh, Hartley! You are the most foolish

creature that ever was, my dear brother." She laughed hysterically. "The child loves the very ground you walk upon. She dreams of you—she is never happy except with you."

"Don't, Sukey, don't—" He began walking about the room. "If you should be wrong. Am I to lose the happiness I have every day?"

"Lose it! And a second time, this nonsense! I haven't patience with the man. While the prettiest and best girl in the world is dying of love for him, he talks about losing happiness!"

"Go send her here, Sukey, dear. It's true our grandfather was a bishop, and hers was a Gray's Inn laundress—no, that was her grandmother." He looked at her with a smile playing about his lips.

"It may be remarkable, Hartley," said Sukey, "to quote yourself, but it is true, that in our family there are two grandfathers, one of whom was not unconnected with the wholesale"—here she made a wry face—"the wholesale glue trade."

"Go away, Sukey," he laughed, giving her that very unusual thing from him, a kiss. He had never, by the way, been very frugal over his kisses for little Lollie, in the old time. "Go away, and send me my little girl."

She came, dancing down the stairs and singing, ready for her walk, in a dainty little costume, all her own invention, and bringing the sunshine into the room with her.

"Here I am, Mr. Venn. Are you impatient? I have only been ten minutes. Where shall we go?"

"I am always impatient, Lollie." He took her hand, and held it for a moment in his.

"Child, I am more than impatient. I am discontented. You give me all the joy I have in life. But you withhold some — the greatest."

She began to tremble, and her eyes filled with tears.

"Give me the greatest, my darling. Never to be separated from you—to have you always with me. Give me the right to take you in my arms, as I used to do when you were a little child. Be my wife, Lollie."

She looked in his face. The eyes were smiling—the face was grave. No wild tempestuous passion such as she might have remembered, only that memory seemed all dead. No fierce light of a burning fire in those eyes —only the light of a full, deep love which nothing could ever destroy.

She threw her arms round his neck, and laid her cheek to his.

"Mr. Venn—Mr. Venn, I have never loved anybody but you."

What could he say? There was nothing to say. Five minutes afterwards, Sukey, hearing no voice, opened the door. They were still standing in that same posture, kissing each other, as Sukey afterwards told Anne, "like a pair of babies."

"My dearest," said Sukey, "I have always prayed for this from the very beginning. Hartley, you must tell Anne. Ring the bell. Anne, you will be glad to hear that Mr. Hartley is going to marry Mrs. Durnford."

Anne sat down, and wiped her eyes with the corner of her apron.

"Now, I'm content to go," she said. "Oh, Mr. Hartley, Mr. Hartley—and she never tired of hearing how I dandled you on my knees when you were a little baby a month old. God bless and keep you both, my dears."

That evening the Chorus assembled. Lynn and Jones arrived nearly at the same moment. Both seemed strangely preoccupied and nervous. Jones could not sit down. He walked about,

upset glasses, and comported himself as one under the influence of strong emotion. Venn only seemed perfectly tranquil.

"What is it, Jones?" he asked at last.

"My play came out last night at the Lyceum."

"Oh," said Lynn; "and failed, of course."

"Never mind," said Venn, "you can easily write another. After all, what matters little disappointments? Mere incidents in our life, giving flavour to what else would be monotonous."

"Yes," said Jones, "if one may quote Byron on such an occasion as the present—

'Oh! weep not for me, though the Bride of Abydos
Wildly calls upon Lara to slumber no more;
Though from Delos to Crete, from Olynthus to Cnidos,
The canoe of the Corsair is hugging the shore.

Oh! weep not for me, though on Marathon's mountain,
The chiefs are at thimblerig, as is their wont;
Though beneath the broad plane tree, by Helicon's fountain,
The languishing Dudu is murmuring "don't."'"

"We will not weep, Jones. Sit down and be cheerful."

"I am a humbug," cried Jones. "Oh! why were you not there? It was a great success. The house screamed. I have succeeded at last

—at last." He sat down, and his voice broke almost into a sob as he added, "I have written to Mary."

"This will not do," said Venn. "He violates every rule of this Chorus. He brings his private joys into what is sacred to private sorrows. Lynn, he must be expelled."

"Stay a moment," said Lynn. "I, too, have something to communicate."

"What? You, too? Have you then—?"

"No, I have accepted a judgeship in Trinidad. I start next month."

Venn looked round him with astonishment.

Then he turned red and confused.

"I, too," he confessed, "have my secret to communicate. Yes, my friends, the Chorus is dissolved. I am going to be married."

They looked at him nervously.

"I am to marry my little girl."

"Thank God," said Lynn.

"Why, who else could I marry? There is but one woman in the world, so far as I am concerned. We shall be married immediately, and go to Italy, till we are tired of it; then we shall come back again. There will be no wedding fuss, or breakfast, or other annoyances—unless Sukey likes to come here for a final kidney."

"And the Opuscula?"

Venn winced.

"I shall begin their careful revision with a view to publication—at my own expense. Lollie is rich, you know," he added, simply. "Besides, it will be good to have something to do. In the morning, we shall roam about and enjoy the sunshine. In the evening, I shall correct the manuscripts while Lollie plays to me. You see, I am not in any hurry about publishing. Perhaps in ten years' time you may see an announcement of their appearance."

"The last night of the Chorus," he went on. "My friends, there stands before us the venerable bottle of champagne which was brought in the very first night of the newly established Chorus, now twelve years ago. This night must witness the drinking of that wine. Aged and mellowed, it is doubtless by this time in splendid condition. I would Arthur were here to join us. Jones, get the champagne glasses from the cupboard. Lynn, my boy, help me to remove the wire. Are we ready? Now, in the sparkle of the generous wine behold the brightness of the future. Our youth will be renewed. We shall live again in the sunshine of success and happiness. Behold!"

He removed his hand from the cork. It did not immediately fly out, and he had recourse to the vulgar expedient of pulling it out with a corkscrew. After great exercise of strength, it came out with a dull thud.

He said nothing; but while all three crowded round the table, he poured out the wine. It was flat, dead, and sour. Not a single sparkle in the glass.

They looked at each other.

Lynn laughed bitterly.

"It is an emblem of life," he said. "Nothing compensates. We have wasted our youth."

Venn stared vacantly at the unhappy wine, which seemed an omen of bad luck.

"I believe it was bad at the beginning," he murmured. "It came from the public-house."

Jones, however, brought his clenched fist upon the table.

"Emblem of life? Compensation? Rubbish!" he cried. "We have waited, we have suffered. What of it? The suffering is gone, the waiting is over. It is no more than the carache I had when I was a boy. Even the memory of it is almost faded. Venn, Lynn, this infernal bottle is the emblem of our hopes and disappointed ambitions. Go, cursed symbol of defeat."

He hurled the bottle into the fireplace, and threw the glasses after it.

"And now, Venn, if you like, I will get you some new champagne, and drink to your happiness, and to yours, Lynn, and to my own. In the words of the poet—

'Look not for comfort in the champagne glasses,
They foam, and fizz, and die;
Only remember that all sorrow passes,
As childhood's ear-aches fly.

At the great Banquet where the Host dispenses,
Ask not, but silent wait;
And when at last your helping turn commences,
Complain not 'tis too late.

And see, O Chorus of the disappointed,
Ourselves not quite forgot;
And after aimless play and times disjointed,
Sunshine and love our lot.'"

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